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Organization of American Historians

Records, 1906-2003

Mss 027

Organization of American Historians Records, 1906-2003

Mss 027

165.0 c.f. (155 cartons, 10 flat boxes) and 33 rolls of microfilm

ABSTRACT

The Organization of American Historians (OAH) was founded in 1907 under the name the Mississippi Valley Historical Association. The founders created a historical organization that encouraged research and study of the area that made up the Mississippi Valley. In 1913 it began to sponsor a scholarly journal, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*. The organization eventually outgrew its brand name as a regional association by gaining members throughout the country. The organization officially changed its name to the Organization of American Historians in 1965. The OAH today is a national organization with a worldwide membership.

ACCESS

This collection has the following restrictions:

1. Access to the records of the OAH Business Office are restricted for 10 years.
2. *Journal of American History* editorial correspondence and referee's evaluations written before 1979 will remain closed for the lifetime of the author unless the reviewer explicitly sanctions opening.
3. *Journal of American History* evaluations written between 1979 and 1986 will remain closed for 10 years or longer in those cases where referees requested other terms.
4. From 1986 onward each referee signs a form to indicate whether he or she is willing to let the author know his or her identity immediately or whether the evaluation shall be closed for 15 years.

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ACQUISITION

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Processed by Debra Brookhart, Brenda Burk, Ann Lee, and Michael Pifer, 2001-2003.

HISTORICAL NOTE

The Organization of American Historians (OAH), originally the Mississippi Valley Historical Association, was founded in 1907 through the efforts of seven men:

William S. Bell, Montana Historical & Misc. Library
Edgar R. Harlan, Historical Department of Iowa
George W. Martin, Kansas State Historical Society
Clarence S. Paine, Nebraska State Historical Society
Francis A. Sampson, State Historical Society of Missouri
Benjamin F. Shambaugh, State Historical Society of Iowa
Warren Upham, Minnesota Historical Society.

Its purpose was to encourage research and study of the history of the Mississippi Valley and to provide a means of communication among the secretaries of historical societies. Clarence Paine was elected to be the Secretary-Treasurer and the Nebraska State Historical Society, its headquarters. Membership was based on payment of dues, governed by an Executive Committee, and mainly open to heads of historical societies and professional historians in academic institutions. The organization was created with the idea that it would be open only to those active in the profession within the regional parameters of the Mississippi Valley. The two major functions of the organization were to sponsor meetings to facilitate the dissemination of research and scholarly study and to publish. An annual meeting of members satisfied the first function. The organization created a scholarly journal to satisfy the second. A board of editors was selected in 1913 to oversee the production of the first issue of the organization's journal, *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*.

In 1916 Clarence Paine died leaving the organization in a state of transition that led to the election of his widow, Clara Paine, as the secretary-treasurer of the organization. During this period the ties to historical societies began to diminish and the idea that non-professional historians should be included in the organization's membership emerged. Clara's legacy to the organization extend beyond her 36 years as secretary-treasurer. Although a controversial election because she was a woman and admittedly not a historian, Clara ran the organization effectively. In charge of membership, finances, and the general operation of the office, Clara helped to establish the organization as a reputable force in the field of American History.

Ill health led to Clara's resignation in 1952. What followed was a period of change for the organization that lasted through the 1970s. An interim secretary-treasurer found guilty of mishandling funds, a name change for the organization and its journal, a debate over using the organization as an instrument for social reform, and the relocation of the organization to Utah with its secretary-treasurer, William Aeschbacher, all signalled what would become a period of landmark changes within the organization. One of the greatest debates in the organization's history entered in the 1950s just prior to Clara's retirement. For many years, the boundaries of the organization gradually stretched beyond the Mississippi Valley and many members were finding it difficult for their institutions to fund trips to a regional organization's annual meeting.

Many felt it time to officially recognize the national character of the organization and that a name change was the appropriate action. Clara and other members forcefully argued against the change and worked for its defeat. In 1964, the name of the journal officially changed to *The Journal of American History* to acknowledge its national audience. The organization soon followed with the change from the Mississippi Valley Historical Association to the Organization of American Historians signifying its emergence as a national organization.

After the retirement of Clara Paine, the organization's ties to the Nebraska Historical Society began to weaken. Paine's next two successors, James Olson and William Aeschbacher, were both the head of the Nebraska Historical Society during their tenures. During Aeschbacher's term, he changed positions and the organization moved with him to Utah. Its time in Utah lasted only as long as Aeschbacher was secretary-treasurer. In 1969, the position of secretary-treasurer was then divided into two separate entities - executive secretary and treasurer with Aeschbacher as treasurer and David Miller as executive secretary. After some discussion, the organization eventually relocated to the campus of Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana in 1970 with Thomas Clark as its executive secretary. The organization continues to reside in its Bloomington, Indiana, home.

Throughout the 1970s the organization moved beyond its academic and educational focus to involvement in political issues. Civil rights entered into discussions as the organization's membership became more racially diverse. Annual meetings raised difficult questions because many hotels would not allow the African-American membership the same accommodations as the white membership. In some cases, they were not received in the hotels at all. The organization responded with a board decision to use hotels that allowed all members the same privileges. Women's rights was another political arena for the organization in the 1970s and beyond. The OAH entered into the fight for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) with letters, resolutions, and a convention boycott of states that had not passed the ERA. The organization elected its first female executive director, Joan Hoff-Wilson, in 1981. The OAH's involvement with the formation of the National Coordinating Council for the Promotion of History (NCC) secured its place in the political arena and the NCC became the lobbying tool for its member organizations.

Today, the Organization of American Historians is active in the field of American history through its wide variety of programs and activities. Programs of the OAH include the areas of education, preservation, history standards, publishing, awards, and a host of other initiatives. Although the importance of history education in schools was always a key issue for the organization, the OAH in more recent years called itself to action to respond need to emphasize history at the primary and secondary levels of education. As a result, the organization became involved in National History Day, the setting of national history standards, the publication of resources for elementary and high school history teachers such as the *Magazine of History*, and a focus on teaching day at the annual conference.

With a membership of 11,000, the OAH continues to support and promote scholarship, research,

and access to documents in the field of American History. The organization's staff has grown considerably from the small office of one at the Nebraska Historical Society to a vast array of individuals helping meet the mission and goals of the organization. The annual meeting, the organization's main source of income along with membership dues, brings together historians nationwide. The OAH now has three major publications: *The Journal of American History*, its scholarly journal; *The OAH Magazine of History*, focusing on teachers and educators; and the Newsletter, providing commentary, opinions, and happenings within the organization. OAH also continues to support several awards, programs, and advocacy at all levels of government.

The organization is governed by an executive board that is headed by the OAH president and administered by the Executive Director. The president of OAH is elected annually by the membership and has the responsibilities of a chief operating officer for the organization. The president also presides at official meetings and appoints committees. General charge over the affairs of the organization falls to the executive board. This body is responsible for calling and conducting meetings, supervising business affairs, and the publication program. Its decisions affect the direction of the organization. The Executive Director (formerly Executive Secretary and Secretary-Treasurer) of OAH plays a key role in its daily business operations. According to the constitution, the executive director is responsible for the business office including the release of meeting minutes, arrangement of meetings, and correspondence with members. The director also develops and manages the programs of the organization under the direction of the executive board. During the organization's residence in Bloomington, it has expanded in size of staff to over a dozen personnel to carry out its mission to promote "teaching and scholarship about the history of the United, both before and after its formation as a nation-state." While the office of president is elected by the members of OAH, the executive director and treasurer are appointed by the board.

Another of major component of OAH's structure is the editorial office. While the executive office manages publications such as the *OAH Newsletter* and the *Magazine of History*, the organization's main scholarly publication, the *Journal of American History* (JAH), is produced at the editorial office of OAH. Historically, the organization's editorial and executive offices have maintained separate locations because traditionally the offices would relocate when a new executive director or editor was appointed. The editor, like the executive director, is appointed by the OAH Board of Directors and is advised by an editorial board also appointed by the OAH Board. These two factors have helped both offices develop into separate entities. In 1963 the editorial office moved to Bloomington, Indiana when Oscar Winther became editor. When OAH moved to Bloomington in 1970, the offices continued to remain separate.

Past officers of OAH

Presidents

Francis A. Sampson (1907)
Thomas M. Owen (1907-1908)
Clarence W. Alvord (1908-1909)
Orin G. Libby (1909-1910)
Benjamin F. Shambaugh (1910-1911)
Andrew C. McLaughlin (1911-1912)
Reuben G. Thwaites (1912-1913)
James A. James (1913-1914)
Isaac J. Cox (1914-1915)
Dunbar Rowland (1915-1916)
Frederic L. Paxson (1916-1917)
St. George L. Sioussat (1917-1918)
Harlow Lindley (1918-1919)
Milo M. Quaife (1919-1920)
Chauncey S. Boucher (1920-1921)
William E. Connelley (1921-1922)
Solon J. Buck (1922-1923)
Eugene C. Barker (1923-1924)
Frank H. Hodder (1924-1925)
James A. Woodburn (1925-1926)
Otto L. Schmidt (1926-1927)
Joseph Schafer (1927-1928)
Charles W. Ramsdell (1928-1929)
Homer C. Hockett (1929-1930)
Louise P. Kellogg (1930-1931)
Beverley W. Bond, Jr. (1931-1932)
John D. Hicks (1932-1933)
Jonas Viles (1933-1934)
Lester B. Shippee (1934-1935)
Louis Pelzer (1935-1936)
Edward E. Dale (1936-1937)
Clarence E. Carter (1937-1938)
William O. Lynch (1938-1939)
James G. Randall (1939-1940)
Carl F. Wittke (1940-1941)
Arthur C. Cole (1941-1942)
Charles H. Ambler (1942-1943)
Theodore C. Blegen (1943-1944)
William C. Binkley (1944-1946)

Herbert A. Kellar (1946-1947)
Ralph P. Bieber (1947-1948)
Dwight L. Dumond (1948-1949)
Carl C. Rister (1949-1950)
Elmer Ellis (1950-1951)
Merle E. Curti (1951-1952)
James L. Sellers (1952-1953)
Fred A. Shannon (1953-1954)
Walter P. Webb (1954-1955)
Edward C. Kirkland (1955-1956)
Thomas D. Clark (1956-1957)
Wendell H. Stephenson (1957-1958)
William T. Hutchinson (1958-1959)
Frederick Merk (1959-1960)
Fletcher M. Green (1960-1961)
Paul W. Gates (1961-1962)
Ray A. Billington (1962-1963)
Avery O. Craven (1963-1964)
John W. Caughey (1964-1965)
George E. Mowry (1965-1966)
Thomas C. Cochran (1966-1967)
Thomas A. Bailey (1967-1968)
C. Vann Woodward (1968-1969)
Merrill Jensen (1969-1970)
David M. Potter (1970-1971)
Edmund S. Morgan (1971-1972)
T. Harry Williams (1972-1973)
John Higham (1973-1974)
John Hope Franklin (1974-1975)
Frank Freidel (1975-1976)
Richard Leopold (1976-1977)
Kenneth M. Stampp (1977-1978)
Eugene D. Genovese (1978-1979)
Carl N. Degler (1979-1980)
William A. Williams (1980-1981)
Gerda Lerner (1981-1982)
Allan G. Bogue (1982-1983)
Anne Firor Scott (1983-1984)
Arthur S. Link (1984-1985)
William E. Leuchtenburg (1985-1986)
Leon F. Litwack (1986-1987)
Stanley N. Katz (1987-1988)
David Brion Davis (1988-1989)

Louis R. Harlan (1989-1990)
Mary Frances Berry (1990-1991)
Joyce Appleby (1991-1992)
Lawrence W. Levine (1992-1993)
Eric Foner (1993-1994)
Gary B. Nash (1994-1995)
Michael Kammen (1995-1996)
Linda K. Kerber (1996-1997)
George M. Fredrickson (1997-1998)
William H. Chafe (1998-1999)
David Montgomery (1999-2000)
Kenneth T. Jackson (2000-2001)
Darlene Clark Hine (2001-2002)
Ira Berlin (2002-2003)

Secretary-Treasurers

Clarence S. Paine (1907-1916)
Clara S. Paine (1916-1952)
James C. Olson (1953-1956)
William Aeschbacher (1956-1969)

Executive Secretaries/Directors

David Miller (1970)
Thomas Clark (1970-1973)
Richard Kirkendall (1973-1981)
Joan Hoff-Wilson (1981-1989)
Arnita A. Jones (1990-1999)
Lee Formwalt (1999-)

Treasurers

William Aeschbacher (1969-1976)
Robert K. Murray (1977-1984)
Cullom Davis (1984-1993)
Gale Peterson (1993-)

***Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Editors**

Benjamin F. Shambaugh (1908-1914) (*Proceedings*)
Clarence W. Alvord (1914-1923)
Lester B. Shippee (1923-1924)
Milo M. Quaife (1924-1930)
Arthur C. Cole (1930-1941)
Louis Pelzer (1941-1946)
Wendell H. Stephenson (1946-1953)
William C. Binkley (1953-1963)

Oscar O. Winther (1963-1964)

***Journal of American History* Editors**

Oscar O. Winther (1964-1966)

Martin Ridge (1966-1978)

Lewis Perry (1978-1984)

Paul Lucas (1984-1985)

David Thelen (1985-1999)

Joanne Meyerowitz (1999-)

REFERENCES

Aeschbacher, William D. "The Mississippi Valley Historical Association, 1907-1965," *The Journal of American History* (September 1967), 339-353.

Constitution of the Organization of American Historians:

<http://www.oah.org/about/constitution.html>

The Organization of American Historians website: <http://www.oah.org>

RELATED MATERIALS

National Council on Public History Records, 1977-2002, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, IUPUI University Library, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.

Society for Historians of the Early American Republic (SHEAR) Records, 1978-1994, Ruth Lilly Special Collections and Archives, IUPUI University Library, Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The records of the Organization of American Historians are extensive and provide an in-depth look at the history and evolution of the organization. Although records such as board minutes and conference proceedings have small gaps, they provide the best overview of the organization because of their continuity. The collection is also evidence of the growth of the organization from a small, one-person office to an office environment employing several individuals.

Executive Board Records, 1907-1998, consist of minutes, reports, administrative records, a newsletter, committees, past president files, legal information, and correspondence all dealing with the organization's executive board. This series is divided into five areas: Minutes,

Administration, Correspondence, Committee Records, and Past President Files. The minutes are the best resource for obtaining a broad overview of the organization. Although incomplete, the board minutes include the earliest meeting and run through 1995. The least amount of documentation is available during the 1920s-1940s, but some information about decisions made affecting the organization during this period is located in the *journal, Mississippi Valley Historical Review*.

The Administration Files contain the articles of incorporation, constitution, bylaws, and executive secretary reports to the board. A brief newsletter, the *Board Bulletin*, 1991-1996, kept board members informed about OAH Executive Office activities. Board correspondence includes the writings of individual board members and the executive director discussing major activities and future directions of the organization.

The Committee Files are the largest portion of the records in this series. Information about the members, goals, and activities of most of the OAH committees can be found here. They are divided into three sections: awards, service, and joint committees with other organizations. These records contain correspondence, reports, and minutes from the various committees of the organization and indicate the long-term goals and projects of OAH. More information about specific projects are located in the subject files of the Executive Director records. Although information about the Membership Committee is located in this series, information about individual members and membership lists are maintained by the office of the treasurer and are located in the Treasurer Files.

Past president Files contain mostly biographical information. Included are histories, brief overviews, and correspondence.

Executive Office and Executive Director Files, 1906-2000, is the largest segment of the OAH records. These records best reflect the growth of the organization. They are produced by the main administrative office of the organization and document most of its activities. This series is divided into two areas: Executive Office and Executive Director.

The Executive Office Files contain correspondence and subject files. There are two distinct sets of correspondence. The alphabetical correspondence covers the years 1906-1995 and is arranged by year and then the person with whom the director is corresponding. Between 1906 and 1953, the organization maintained a staff of one (the director) and the correspondence for these years is the only record of the activities of the executive office. This correspondence reflects all of the roles the director fulfilled in the office as well as their own personal correspondence with individuals and organizations. After 1953 the organization and its staff expanded. Between 1953 and 1969, James Olson and William Aeschbacher each served as director. While the alphabetical correspondence continues to document the activities in the executive office, the directors maintain their own personal records located in the Executive Director Files of this series. Following 1969 as the organization continued to undergo major administrative change, the alphabetical correspondence remains a source for information about

the activities of the executive office, but programs and further information about occurrences during a director's tenure may be found in the subject files. The daily correspondence files cover the years 1984-1999 and overlap some with the alphabetical correspondence. It is arranged chronologically by the date sent or received. Although the information within these files do not duplicate the alphabetical files, they represent different filing systems. To fully understand the years contained in the files both sets of correspondence files as well as the subject files should be consulted. The final and largest set of records in this area is the subject files. As the organization grew, it became more involved in new programs, added personnel, and became politically active. The subject files cover this wide range of activities and represent the program side of the organization from the mid-1970s to 2000. Three executive directors' tenures are represented by this set of records: Richard Kirkendall, Joan Hoff Wilson, and Arnita Jones.

The second area this series covers is the Executive Director Files. These files include the correspondence files of three executive directors: James Olson, William Aeschbacher, and Thomas Clark. These files contain correspondence with specific individuals about program activities and is an excellent resource to understand each directors' goals and programs. To receive a more complete view of the happenings in the organization during these directors' tenures, the alphabetical correspondence should also be consulted.

Treasurer Files, 1907-1998, contain audits, correspondence, budgets, membership information, and reports from the office of the treasurer of the OAH. The two major reports in this series are the membership and treasurer reports. Much of this information is incomplete, but can be used with the executive board minutes to construct an accurate picture of the organization's financial status throughout its history. The membership information includes the card files and membership lists used to track member names, addresses, and years in the organization. This series also includes the financial ledgers maintained by the treasurer that indicated the names of both individual and institutional members and the amount paid during a particular year. The member cards and ledgers only cover the period of the beginning of the organization through the early 1960s, the period of the combined Secretary-Treasurer position. This series also contains the correspondence of individual treasurers that includes information about their role as treasurer and involvement in committee work.

Annual Conference Programs, 1910-1911, 1913-1914, 1916-1917, 1921-1925, 1927, 1929, 1932-1936, 1938-1944, 1947-1948, 1950-1989, 1991-1993, 1997, contain an incomplete set of the programs and business meeting minutes from the annual OAH conference. More information about the annual conference is located in the *Journal of American History* records as published proceedings that include papers presented and meeting minutes.

Publications Files, 1908-1999, consist of the materials related to the various publication projects of OAH. These include the *OAH Newsletter*, *Journal of American History* (JAH), the *Magazine of History*, and other publications produced either by the executive or editorial offices of the organization. The records are divided into two areas: materials published by the executive

office and those published by the editorial office. Included in the executive office publications are the *OAH Newsletter* and the *Magazine of History*. The files contain correspondence regarding the publication of these resources and incomplete sets of both the magazine and newsletter as well as executive office correspondence regarding the publication of the *Journal of American History*. This correspondence helps indicate the relationship between the executive office and the editorial office where the journal is actually produced.

The main portion of records in this series come from the editorial office and include the records of the *Journal of American History*, editorial board minutes, correspondence, awards, reports, editor files, accepted and rejected manuscripts and copies of the journal. The main administrative functions of this office are covered in the editorial board, awards, and correspondence files. They contain a good overview of the office's activities and in the instance of the correspondence files, 1930-1992, cover a vast time period and document the evolution of the journal. The editorial office publishes the *Journal of American History*, the scholarly journal of OAH. Within the journal records are a complete set of print copies and an incomplete set of microfilm copies of the publication. The journal is also available online through JSTOR, 1914-1999, (<http://www.jstor.org/cgi-bin/jstor/listjournal/>) and the History Cooperative, 1999-present, (<http://www.historycooperative.org/jahindex.html>). The records also contain both the accepted and rejected manuscript files of the journal. The accepted manuscripts include copies of the earliest version of the article (if available), peer reviews, and correspondence related to reviews. Rejected manuscript files include peer reviews and correspondence related to those reviews. The policy of the editorial office is to return declined manuscripts and there are few instances of the files containing a copy of them. Our records do not include complete manuscript files prior to 1950 or the last five years of material. Access to the manuscript files is governed by a restriction policy.

Photograph Files, 1907-1997, contain photographs of the presidents, executive secretaries, treasurers, secretary-treasurers, chairmen of the board, and editors of OAH. The photographs are arranged alphabetical by the individual's name.

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