

### Chuck LeWarne recollects Presidency of the Guild

*This article continues an effort to maintain a conversation between some of the founding members of the Guild and current members. Chuck was president of the Guild from 1987 to 1988.*

*Chuck warns, "However enjoyable reminiscences can be, they may also demonstrate that traditional concern about oral history: what I recall may not be exactly as it was, only how I recall it."*

I remember vividly the excitement of opening the mail one afternoon many years ago and finding an invitation to meet with a group of historians who specialized in local and regional history. The small group that Paul Spitzer has previously described had met earlier [in the summer of 1980] to consider forming an organization, but I knew nothing of that.

I was part of the 'second tier' who received this invitation to an organizational meeting. The goal was to provide local historians with an opportunity to meet regularly, discuss their endeavors, and share ideas. My role as a suburban high school history teacher was good and satisfying and I found time to continue doing research and writing, but the stimulation of graduate school and regular associations with other historians had become long past. I scarcely knew any.

I assumed that academics centered at the University and on other campuses had opportunities to meet and, frankly, I missed it all. Nor did I realize that there were other practitioners of history outside the regular academic world who felt much that same kind of isolation. And so I attended the first organizational meeting - and then regular meetings of the Guild - with a sense of euphoria that continues to this day. I knew scarcely anyone at that first meeting, but many became close friends, treasured colleagues, and in the case of Bob Ficken, a co-author.

As I recall, those early meetings were held somewhat irregularly at either Smith Hall or Hutchinson Hall. Our small number elected Howard Droker as first president and wrestled with issues always involved in forming a new group. There was some discussion about the term "Guild," which was finally chosen over "society," "association," and other generic terms largely because of its historical allusion to our practicing a craft. The "Pacific Northwest" recognized an intent that extended beyond the clear Seattle-area orientation. Some of those efforts are noted below.

At early meetings we discussed whether membership should be open to anyone and if there should be qualifications to join. A somewhat elitist view suggested that membership be extended by invitation and limited to established, practicing historians; the other view, which Paul Spitzer has recently described as the populist view, was that the Guild be open to anyone with a serious interest in local history and that membership issues would eventually filter themselves out. That view, quite fortunately in my opinion, prevailed to the clear advantage of the organization and its diverse members.

Some of the founders envisioned the Guild as a continuation of the graduate seminars we had all experienced where members would read papers of work in progress that would then be discussed and examined by listeners. That practice took place only a few times before we adopted the current habit of having programs presented by scholars and others. On one relatively early evening we lacked a program and had to improvise. We asked everyone present to describe in some detail his or her current projects and interests. It proved so successful that it remained an almost annual feature for several years.... I think groups can become so tightly organized that attendees have few opportunities to truly talk and share with one another, and so such efforts are positive.

Along the way we began other endeavors that have become traditional Guild activities. The newsletter got underway. The annual conference grew out of a desire to extend beyond ourselves and bring together fellow historians, teachers, representatives of historical organizations, and history buffs in a relatively informal but productive time. In the early '80s there were few such conferences available, since the established Pacific Northwest History Conference was attended largely by scholars.

Somewhat hesitantly and uncertain of how we would proceed, the planning session for the first conference was held at Howard Droker's home, and Doug Lee, long since moved out of the area, became the conference chair. We were always concerned that papers and discussions be presented well in addition to showing solid scholarship. The conferences' success, under Jane Sanders and others, is, I think it safe to say, legendary. After a year or two a banquet with a prominent speaker was added. Our annual award began as a lifetime membership, a way for an organization with limited funds to honor persons who had done significant work in local history. Several years ago, this was changed to become the Pacific Northwest History Award.

I was the fourth president, serving from 1987 to 1988. An exceptional group served on the board those years including Bill Woodward as vice president, Carla Rickerson, Doris Pieroth, Eleanor Toews, Junius Rochester, and several who have left the area. In my own memory, the specific events of those two years largely blend into those of the surrounding period. Margaret Hall took over editorship of the newsletter and did a superb job building upon what had previously been started.

One of our conference luncheon speakers was Washington First Lady Jean Gardner, whom we considered quite a coup. She spoke from her position as co-chair of the Washington State centennial celebration. About this time, we tried to extend our activities beyond the Seattle area, and we occasionally held meetings and conferences in Tacoma, Everett, and Olympia. A group of Olympia-area historians made a short-lived effort to establish a South Sound branch chapter of the Guild. Now, under the leadership of Chuck Richards, the Guild is reaching outward again and, I hope, with more enduring results.

I also recall an afternoon retreat at the Port Ludlow house of Junius Rochester involving officers and several other interested members. With the Guild firmly established and several years old, it seemed appropriate to assess our role and

activities and to chart future directions. It was a relaxed and enjoyable day in comfortable wooded surroundings. But alas, I have neither solid recollections nor easily found accounts of what we decided. I do know however that because of what we did - or perhaps in spite of it - or most likely irrespective of it - the Guild has endured, prospered, and grown to its present solid position.