

FOUNDING THE GUILD

by Paul Spitzer

The Guild was created, like the world itself, by a committee. The group met over several months in 1980 and included Jane Sanders, Doris Pieroth, Karyl Winn, Jack Berryman, David Buerge, Dan Peterson, Robert Ficken, Robert Burke, Doug Lee, Rich Berner, Jonathan Dembo and possibly others now forgotten over the course of two decades. It also included Howard Droker and Paul Spitzer who arranged meetings which were held at several locations including the UW's Hutchinson Hall and Dan Peterson's home.

Karen Blair originally suggested the idea of a society. It was an idea that Howard and Paul had individually considered and, in a conversation in a hallway at Seattle Center, they agreed to form a committee. Howard, who at the time was the historian for a large library program called "This City Seattle", was impressed by the number of people who were doing local history on their own, largely unattached. Paul, who had resigned at the Museum of History and Industry and joined Boeing, was concerned with the isolation felt by historians working outside of academic institutions.

The committee participants changed slightly from meeting to meeting, but there was a constant spirit of agreement. Goals were easily agreed upon and by-laws as well. How the Guild would be administered caused no difficulties. In all of these areas the committee's decisions were thoroughly conventional. There were no James Madisons or Thomas Jeffersons in the group. Those who today support their cause with words from the Guild's original documents should remember how little discussion there was on most matters. Participants generally felt that reaching agreement was more important than issues.

One issue, however, did cause considerable discussion and some disagreement. That was in regard to membership and who should be allowed to join. It was not a question of whether archivists, teachers, librarians and similar occupations would qualify. Everyone was of the opinion that the Guild would benefit from their inclusion. It was also not a question whether people should be invited or should simply join if they wished. The latter was clearly preferred. The controversy was over whether membership was open to all or only to people who participated in the field. Feelings were fairly strong and in the end what could be called the populist position prevailed: membership was open to all. The concern of being overrun might be called "hopeful anxiety." In fact only people with at least one foot firmly in history have wanted to join.

Join what? The committee never felt completely satisfied with any of the names suggested and only toward the end chose a name. And although "Pacific Northwest" referred to the subject matter there has always been a hint that it described where the membership lived. "Historians" without an apostrophe seemed a little odd, but it was still grammatically correct. And while

"Guild" was a peculiar term, the committee realized completing its task was more important than discussing the name any more. It would be the Pacific Northwest Historians Guild.

It readied the documents that were necessary to register with Washington's secretary of state and elected Howard Droker to be the provisional president. The next meetings were official and included a host of new members.

Had it been a baby that was born, it would now be old enough to sign contracts, join the Army, get married without parental approval, or enjoy a drink. It's said that when Benjamin Franklin was watching a hot air balloon rise into the sky, a person asked him of what possible use was it. Franklin replied, "Of what use is a baby?" Today the Guild has answered that question many times over.