

Guild Recollections, 1995-1998
Richard H. Engeman
Public Historian, Oregon Historical Society

My recollections of the three years I served as Guild president are shaded by turmoil and transition. It was not a tranquil period in the Guild's history. I'd like to think I helped the organization during my term, but it's still difficult for me to analyze. For one thing, the time to develop perspective has not yet passed; for another, it was a term cut short on both ends.

I joined the Guild not too long after I came from southern Oregon to take a job at the University of Washington Libraries in 1983. Two of my new colleagues, Carla Rickerson and Karyl Winn, assured me that the Guild was not really as choosy about membership as I suspected it was from its name. And they were right. The Guild proved to include many congenial and dedicated practitioners and advocates of Pacific Northwest history. I got hooked.

Over the years, I had served on the Guild board, but my ascendancy to the presidential chair was unplanned. When circumstances caused Phil Lothyan to step down in 1995, my arm was twistable. Probably because the Guild Rambles were among my favorite activities, I bracket my brief service with them. My run as president of the Guild began with a train trek to Vancouver, B.C. in September 1995, and it ended with an other-worldly caravan to Westport and Tokeland in October 1998.

The Ramble to Vancouver was a good start: a train trip along Puget Sound always makes *me* feel like the world is okay. Once in Vancouver we toured a couple of historical museums and rode the water taxis, and then watched a cat burglar get caught while crawling over an apartment wall under police searchlights. Add in the Chinese dinner and the Sun Yat Sen garden and we had a memorable as well as educational trek.

Memorable, too, was the next major job the Guild tackled: that of co-hosting a national history conference, with the Council on Public History, in April 1996. Titled "History and the Public Interest," the conference co-hosting opportunity came to the Guild through member Lisa Mighetto. It grew to become a major investment by the Guild and others. The Northwest Oral History Association joined in, too, for example, to create the mix for a conference that gave the Guild national visibility. The Guild membership fully participated in a very challenging program, a circumstance that made me very proud of us all.

In looking over the newsletters, I am somewhat astonished at how much the Guild tried to deal with in these few years. Perhaps it's not so surprising that we did not get them all quickly wrapped up, but we certainly did tackle some hard issues. So very many people contributed that I hate to name names, because I will inevitably overlook someone. But in the time between those bracketing Rambles of 1995 and 1998, the Guild struggled with not only that huge multi-group conference, but also with post-conference burnout, newsletter woes, a contentious debate over the desirability of becoming an 501(c)3

organization, the temporary loss of our longtime meeting space at the National Archives, and a heart-breaking suspension of the annual conference. When I left Seattle at the end of 1998, it was with a great sense of frustration at leaving so many things unfinished or unfixable or uncertain.

The good news is that despite—or in some instance at least perhaps because of—my leaving Seattle, the Guild weathered the woes, regrouped, revived the annual conference, and has marched steadfastly on. The continuity of such stalwart contributors as Mary Wright, Dan Peterson, Eileen McCarey, Rich Berner, Chris Taylor, Jackie Williams, Junius Rochester, Avril Madison, Terry Willis, Jeff Hickey, and so many others, made it possible for the Guild to bridge itself forward to some of the newer members who carry it on so ably today.

And I can't omit mentioning that it was during my term as president that I got to put together, and then go on, one of my favorite Rambles; in fact, I had to lead the tour. But I absolutely loved it: a whole busload of Guild members did a day trip aboard historic Metro buses—one gas-powered, one an electric trolley bus—to and through some of Seattle's trolley car-era subdivisions: Madrona and Queen Anne, Kinnear and Madison Park. We saw bungalows built without auto garages, corner grocery stores, and streetcar neighborhoods that grew up around transfer points, the visible reminders of another way of life. For all that it was a conference that first drew me to the Guild, and drew me back as recently as this spring, it's the Rambles that I appreciated the most.

Being Guild president was a whirlwind experience for me, and, as it happens, the whirlwind whipped around the whole organization for a time. The Guild is a group of survivors; my administration was just a testing ground!