

Leeds Barroll

The Beginnings of the Shakespeare Association of America, 1973-75

In 1972 the only venues for scholars wishing to present papers and meet colleagues in the field of Shakespeare studies were the Modern Language Association, which held one session annually that presented three papers on Shakespeare, and a four-day conference that met every other year, in late August. This meeting of the Shakespeare Institute took place in Stratford-upon-Avon, gathering together an invitation-only membership of British and American scholars. To end what was, in effect, an inadvertent isolation of so many Shakespeare scholars working in the field, it seemed useful to try to establish an Association and an annual meeting of scholars working not only on Shakespeare but also on Renaissance drama in general. Scholarly meetings featuring only one literary figure were then by no means the norm, but the time seemed ripe.

There are always first steps in starting an organization and these first steps moved to the music of money if a new Society was to have objective coherence, protection from frivolous lawsuits, and some kind of legal existence to validate inevitable expenditure of moneys. Most important, of course, was the name of the proposed new organization itself. Something like "The Shakespeare Association of America" comes to mind, but this name already belonged to a body which had published "The Shakespeare Association Bulletin" and whose Trustees met annually in the New York apartment of one of their small number. That Association was incorporated in the state of New York and published the Bulletin for a number of years until it was moved over to the Folger Shakespeare Library where the journal became *The Shakespeare Quarterly*. Following this move, the Association was formally dissolved under the laws of New York State. For the ends of a new organization about Shakespeare, the old Association name therefore had a particular connotation which would help launch it. However, although the name was legally defunct, it did not now, in 1972, seem collegial simply to usurp it.

Overtures were therefore made to the former Trustees but, the name being then withheld, the new organization had no option but to incorporate itself under the name of the University in which I was a professor and from which I published *Shakespeare Studies*. Thus was born "the South Carolina Shakespeare Association," the incorporation of which was archly noted by the *New York Times* as the appearance of "Shakespeare on the Congaree," the river that runs through Columbia where the University of South Carolina is situated. The *Times* was then widely syndicated so that this "Congaree" account persisted in newspapers all over the country, making the new organization seem like a purely local affair. Later, however, and in time for publicity about the first meeting, more specific representations were made by Professor G. E. Bentley of Princeton University to Dr. Mary C. Hyde, who had been a guiding spirit and trustee of the old Association. We were awarded use of the old name and incorporation was re-assumed now as a new "Shakespeare Association of America."

This pattern of scholarly co-operation was replicated by the initial group of scholars who responded to the announcement of our existence even though any actual meeting was a year away. In this regard, our effort was significantly helped because we were probably the first scholarly organization to be as crass in those antique times as to accept MasterCard and Visa cards. The step seems to have been effective, since very few personal checks were received from this early membership which had to deal with this unexpected levy on the small academic

salaries of the very early '70s. Whatever the case, these initial early dues from forward-looking scholars greatly helped with the initial expenditures in preparation for a first meeting.

At this point the time-line was as follows. The Muse of scholarly meetings first generated the idea in the spring of 1972. After incorporation, the organization was now a legal, non-profit entity. Next, a number of scholars were invited to serve as Trustees who would attend a first (organizational) meeting in the late spring of '72. The original Board of Trustees that first met in the Folger Shakespeare Library at the invitation of O. B. Hardison, Jr. in the late spring of 1972 were Dolora G. Cunningham, of San Francisco State University; John C. Guilds, Jr., Provost of the University of South Carolina; O. B. Hardison, Jr., Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library; Mrs. Donald F. Hyde (Dr. Mary C. Hyde); Robert E. Knoll, of the University of Nebraska; Maynard Mack, of Yale University; and Robert H. West, of the University of Georgia; with G. E. Bentley, of Princeton University, serving as President, and Leeds Barroll, Editor of *Shakespeare Studies*, as founder and executive secretary of the new Shakespeare Association of America. The Trustees had hoped to include Professor Alfred Harbage of Harvard University, but, regretfully, he refused the invitation in a postcard observing also that it was so unrealistic to plan for a first meeting less than twelve months in the future.

At this Folger conference, the date of the first meeting of the Association was confirmed for March 29-31, 1973, with the Executive Secretary having made the arrangements with the Washington Hilton Hotel. A detailed program was also constructed and featured an Annual Lecture to be given by Harry Levin, of Harvard University.

At this time and at several subsequent committee meetings, Maynard Mack drew on his experience as a former President of the Modern Language Association of America to spend a great deal of time drawing up, with the Executive Secretary, the Association Constitution and by-laws, the greater part of which has survived over the last four decades.

The first annual meeting of the Shakespeare Association was not only made possible by the work of the Trustees and the first President, but also by the availability of funds not only furnished by the first set of dues paid by the founding membership, but also by others. Grants from the Office of the Provost, John C. Guilds at the University of South Carolina, and from Mr. John D. Whalley of Nashville, Tennessee, were important for the startup mechanics. Great assistance was also furnished by Dr. D. Lydia Bronte, then of the Rockefeller Foundation, who served as a Coordinating Director of the first three annual meetings, while Ann Jennalie Cook, then Assistant Professor of English at South Carolina, was generous with her time and her counsel.

Particular thanks are also due to two persons not primarily working in the field of Shakespeare as a profession. Both have passed away in the last few years. One such was Mr. Noel Martin, a nationally known graphic designer who, among his many other achievements, in 1958 redesigned *The New Republic* in a format that the magazine kept for decades. In 1953 he had been included in "Four American Designers," a landmark exhibition of graphic design at the Museum of Modern Art. His work was also exhibited widely at the Musee d'Art Moderne in Paris and the Grafiska Institute in Stockholm. Among his corporate clients were Champion Papers and Federated Department Stores. Although he obviously commanded large fees, for the

Shakespeare Association he planned and executed gratis the logo, all the different pieces of stationery, and the 1973-1975 programs, just as, previously, he had designed and supervised, gratis, the first printing of *Shakespeare Studies*. He died in 2009.

Dr. Mary C. Hyde was the other generous person. As previously mentioned, she gave her blessing to the SAA's use of the old corporate name and contributed, as her time allowed, to the development of the Association. Although she held a Ph.D. in English from Columbia University (she published *Playwriting for Elizabethans* in 1949), she was best known in scholarly circles for her support of eighteenth-century studies. She and her husband acquired and made available to scholars in their celebrated library at Seven Oaks Farm their important collection of Johnson and Boswell materials. Dr. Hyde withdrew from the SAA Board of Trustees in 1975 owing to her many other commitments as a well-known patron of the arts. Further information about her may be found online by referring to the title she held as a result of her second marriage: Mary Viscountess Eccles. She died in 2003.

The first meeting of the Association took place in Washington D.C. at the Statler Hilton Hotel, Harry Levin delivering the first Annual Lecture in the theater of the Folger Shakespeare Library. As a point of interest, we should note that a future Director of the Folger Library, Gail Paster (then of American University), was Chair of the local Committee on Arrangements, holding the kind of responsibility now well understood by other members of the Association who subsequently held that onerous title.

In the late spring of 1973 the Trustees met in California to organize the second annual meeting of the Association to be held in Pasadena, California, close to San Marino and the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery. Accordingly, the 1974 meeting of the Association was held March 28th-30th at the Huntington-Sheraton Hotel, 1974, with Professor G. E. Bentley finishing the second year of his two-year term as the first President of the Association. The Huntington Library hosted the reception and Catherine Shaw (then of the University of California at Riverside) chaired the local Committee on Arrangements. At the luncheon it was announced that Professor Madeleine Doran would preside at the 1975 meeting as the first elected President of the Association. The Annual Lecture at the 1974 meeting was delivered by Robert B. Heilman. Leeds Barroll continued as executive secretary and announced that the 1975 meeting would be held in New Haven, with Yale University acting as host.

Late in the autumn of 1974 Leeds Barroll was offered the Deputy Directorship of the Division of Research Grants at the National Endowment for the Humanities in Washington and was beginning preliminary duties before the year end. Ann Jennalie Cook, formerly his colleague at the University of South Carolina, was instrumental in smoothing a transition to the New Haven meeting where Barroll, meeting with the Trustees, announced that he wished to avoid any conflicts of interest possibly arising from his new position and resigned as Executive Secretary. He also nominated Ann Cook as his successor. There being no other nominations, the Trustees unanimously voted to invite Cook to serve as the new executive secretary.

The New Haven meeting was held March 20th-22nd, Madeleine Doran presiding, with the Third Annual Lecture presented by Hallett D. Smith. Chair of the Committee on Arrangements was Marjorie Garber (then at Yale). Ann Jennalie Cook then formally assumed the position at

which she had already been at work since the late autumn of 1974. She now had the daunting task of organizing the SAA as part of a World Shakespeare Conference made possible by a grant from the N.E.H. funds made especially available as part of the celebration of the Bicentennial Anniversary of the United States.