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The Shakespeare Association of America, 1996-2018

At the town-hall members' meeting of 2018, Arthur Little described the SAA as his "intellectual home." Could I have hoped for a better exit line? Over the course of my twenty-two years as executive director, and with the collaboration and provocation of elected officers, staff persons, and members in their many hundreds, the SAA has developed in ways that surely could not have been imagined at its inception in 1972. Our founder Leeds Barroll envisioned a venue for Shakespeare specialists to present academic papers and engage with learned colleagues. I am glad that he was in Los Angeles to see our growth not just in numbers but also in programming, partnerships, and professional advancement. From the dais at the annual luncheon, Peter Holland recognized the "essay" in the "SA" of the Shakespeare Association, and in my experience that has been the heart of it: the endeavor to do more for and to do better by the scholars and teachers who engage with the works, times, and afterlife associated with the name of Shakespeare.

When I began in 1996, we were an organization without even an email address, much less a website; hashtags were far in the future. The SAA website has now gone through multiple incarnations and hosts digital scans of past bulletins and past conference programs as well as an assortment of other materials that help document our history. At one stage, I asked Leeds Barroll as founder and Ann Jennalie Cook as his successor executive secretary if they would write memoirs on the SAA's early years; these can be found on the site's "archives" pages. My contribution is a behind-the-scenes perspective on how the SAA became more than a collection of conferences.

It was Ann Cook who had the brilliant inspiration to make research seminars the heart of the meetings. These were anti-hierarchical in spirit, bringing junior and senior scholars together around each seminar table. As our numbers grew over the years, seminar enrollments climbed to twenty-one and twenty-two members until, in 2008, I asked the trustees whether these were the intellectual experiences of our aspirations. The board agreed to mandate a maximum of sixteen that we have maintained ever since. The enrollment cap has put increasing pressure on successive Program Committees to organize enough seminars for those seeking placements, but every year, year after year, a small group of five or six SAA members has risen to the challenge with energy, intentionality, and tenacity. We offered thirty-three seminars in 1997 and sixty-two in 2018. The number of seminars has also proved challenging for site planning. Ann scheduled them for the late afternoons of the three conference days, so that discussions could continue freely in the corridors and at the cash bars, but in 2013 we faced the choice of changing the schedule or moving from hotels to convention centers. We added Thursday-morning seminars. With three seminar slots and sixty seminars, we needed twenty meeting rooms; with four seminar slots and sixty seminars, just fifteen.

Through the seminars, the SAA has always been a mentoring organization. I was lucky to discover this for myself when I came to my first conference, in Ashland in 1983, as a Ph.D. candidate. Within a few years, the trustees started hosting a "coffee" (now known as a "breakfast") for graduate students, and in 2006 we began awarding student travel grants. It was in keeping with our founder's original vision that one of the earliest SAA initiatives that was not conference-based was the annual J. Leeds Barroll Dissertation Prize. Peter Holland suggested it in 2007, and we awarded our first prize in 2008. For years, we have had a plenary session on the Friday morning of conference week. In 2015, we added a second one, the NextGenPlen, to feature the work of early-career scholars. A landmark project for 2016 was the free-to-members publication of a collection of essays, *Shakespeare in Our Time*, that was true to the SAA spirit. For each of twenty different approaches to "Shakespeare" (from feminism to ecocriticism), there were lead essays by distinguished senior scholars, eighteen of them past presidents, but also two "satellite" essays to introduce alternative voices.

Democracy, in short, is in our DNA. Inclusivity is a continuing project. The first, 1972 board of trustees was perforce constituted by appointment, and it is to be noted that Leeds Barroll included two women among the inaugural officers, Dolora Cunningham and Mary Hyde. Madeleine Doran was voted president almost immediately, in 1974. But there would not be another woman president until 1986, as Jean Addison Roberts remarked when elected. She was able nonetheless to celebrate the intervening years for the tidal wave of Shakespeare scholarship by women. Mario DiGangi paid tribute to how the SAA “nurtured” queer studies in the 1990s, and race was a leading theme of the 2013 and 2017 meetings. There was more debate about what constitutes a “Shakespeare dissertation” (as we set out guidelines for the Barroll prize) than has ever been engaged regarding a “Shakespeare conference.” Thematically, we have always been catholic, and our recent partnerships with the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women, ESRA (the European Shakespeare Research Association), and SHARP (the Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing) signal our continuing interest in defining Shakespeare as largely as possible. We welcome each of these organizations to sponsor an SAA seminar yearly. The trustees came to realize, though, that our institutional structures had lagged behind thematic programming. In 2015, Ayanna Thompson proposed an annual Scholars of Color Social, which the Folger Shakespeare Library has importantly underwritten. We added travel grants for contingent faculty in 2016. Our constitution was thoroughly updated that same year, largely on procedural and governance grounds, but in 2017 we returned to the membership for one further amendment, adding to the organization’s “purposes” the goal of pursuing “inclusive and diverse policies of membership.”

2017 was also the year we lost Ann Cook, who had done so much to shape the expansive ethos of the SAA. She always retained her zest for the organization, and I know that she was particularly gratified that it had become a destination conference for so many scholars from outside North America. She attended her last meeting in April, with her husband Gerry Calhoun at her side, and they died within hours of each other on 13 August, hand in hand in adjoining hospital beds. It could be argued that one of our earliest representations of ourselves as a community was the 2003 introduction of *in memoriam* notices in our semi-annual bulletins, since succeeded by a dedicated page on the SAA website. The trustees long ago voted that member media, not a luncheon address, were the proper forums for such announcements; their aim was that our in-person gatherings should remain forward-looking. But we should probably have made an exception, in Los Angeles, for Ann Jennalie Cook.

SAA presidents tend to be nervous about the tradition of the luncheon talk. Coppélia Kahn admitted, “I’ve been agonizing over it for two years,” from the moment she was elected vice-president. A few years ago I undertook to collect as many speeches as possible for archiving on our website. I will always regret that I missed the opportunity to capture Leeds Barroll’s hilarious account of remarks purportedly erased by an errant key stroke. Alas, the genuine address was lost not to computer mishap but to routine hardware and software upgrades. Preserved on the website are other addresses of great wit, from Jeanne Roberts’s sardonic account of SAA panelists and their interlocutors to Fran Dolan’s sharply observed tales from the classroom, Dymphna Callaghan’s confessions regarding conference encounters with great men named Stephen, and Russ McDonald’s sublime rhyme of “venery” and “plenary” in a “Lyric Ode Upon the Foundation of the Shakespeare Association of America.” From these speeches and others, one develops a sense of the SAA as an institution with a vivid communal history. In a different key were the luncheon remarks that marked the more momentous events we have shared: Jean Howard on the new millennium, Anthony Dawson on the terrorist attacks of 9/11, William C. Carroll on the devastations of Hurricane Katrina, Georgianna Ziegler on the war in Iraq, Diana Henderson on the bombing at the Boston Marathon, Heather James on Executive Order 13769 (the “Muslim ban”). It was Bill Carroll’s idea to support Katrina-affected scholars by waiving their registration fees and offering three hotel nights at the next meeting, in Philadelphia. In a further act of community, we also organized a book drive to help restore the lost libraries of our Louisiana and

Mississippi members. As evidence of the intelligence and the humanity of those we elected to lead us, all of our president's addresses are worth re-encountering.

We arrived at a defining moment in January 2017, when, amid tumultuous events in the public sphere, SAA members made it clear that they wanted the SAA to become a voice for their values. Historically, we had refrained from making public statements; just who "is" the SAA – that is, who can speak for all its members? But old caution was overtaken by a pressing need for alliance and allegiance in the wake of Executive Order 13769. Heather James rose to the demands for a different kind of SAA presidency. In 2016 we had taken up Diana Henderson's suggestion for a general members' meeting at the conference; for 2017 we dedicated this meeting to the challenges of our new political and academic realities. We joined Scholars at Risk and began to collaborate with colleagues at the American Council of Learned Societies and the National Humanities Alliance on statements, petitions, and lobbying efforts.

The founding Constitution of the SAA provided for the Board of Trustees to appoint a Program Committee and a Nominating Committee. By 1997, we also had a selection committee for an Open Submissions panel, which has since evolved into the NextGenPlen Selection Committee. As I write, other standing committees include an Executive Committee, a Dissertation Prize Committee, a Digital Strategies Committee, and a Travel Grants Committee. The Executive Committee is now constitutionally mandated. The Digital Strategies Committee, which began by organizing the inaugural Digital Room of 2014, for exhibits of digital humanities projects, has undertaken many other initiatives involving social media and member engagement. The Travel Grants Committee, which initially made awards to graduate students, also reviewed applications for research grants to the non-tenured between 2009 and 2011. These were redeveloped as conference grants for contingent faculty in 2016. The committee has read materials for a program of residencies at the Liguria Study Center that I secured between 2012 and 2015, and for one-month SAA fellowships at the Huntington Library and Folger Library that were arranged by Heather James to begin in 2018. There was a time, as Heather observed, when SAA offices were largely honorific. These days they represent serious, stalwart labor on behalf of all members.

SAA trustees serve for three-year terms on a nine-member board. The terms are staggered, so that each year three members retire and we elect three new members. I say "we" although I've not voted during my executive directorship; one of the serendipitous pleasures of the position has been to encounter the good will and good work of people I'd not previously known. Our principal officer is vice-president for one year, president for one year, and immediate past president for one year, but this formal governance structure misrepresents the depth and durability of their commitment to the SAA. Jean Howard, president in 1999-2000, headed up an ad hoc Committee on Strategic and Long-Range Planning in 2016; Bill Carroll, president in 2005-2006, chaired the ad hoc Constitutional Review Committee of 2016; Georgianna Ziegler, president in 2006-2007, curated the research resources page for several versions of our website; Peter Holland, president in 2007-2008, joined the effort to interview 180 members by way of a self-study in 2010; Suzanne Gossett and Dymphna Callaghan, presidents in 2011-2012 and 2012-2013, edited *Shakespeare in Our Time* between 2013 and 2016; Rebecca Bushnell, president in 2014-2015, led the search committee that appointed Karen Raber as my successor in 2018; Mario DiGangi, president in 2015-2016, revised our seminar guidelines. Other members of the board have also been called back, including Valerie Traub and Lars Engle, who chaired the ad hoc committees that developed our Sexual Harassment and Academic Integrity policies.

A major undertaking of my term in office was to work towards the SAA's stability and sustainability. We had run for many years on a break-even basis, and, as James Bulman put it in 1999, we were the "Blanche DuBois of academic organizations." He referred to the fact that we have relied upon the kindness of colleges and universities in the region of our conference to underwrite hosting expenses, because our registration fees have never covered the costs of the meetings. Nor have our membership

dues been sufficient to our administrative expenditures; Jim might also have remarked on the degree to which we depend upon our university homes – for me, the University of Maryland Baltimore County between 1996 and 2007 and Georgetown University between 2007 and 2018. I don't believe Jim knew another of our dependencies, which was that my predecessor as executive director, Nancy Elizabeth Hodge, had floated the SAA on her personal credit card when income fell behind outlay.

It was a tribute to Nancy's administrative genius that the SAA came to me with \$41,128 in the bank. The SAA had invited the International Shakespeare Association to hold its Sixth World Shakespeare Congress in Los Angeles in the spring of 1996. This was a lavish affair. There were a dozen theatrical performances; a festival called "A Century of Shakespeare on Screen," with twenty-one rare films; receptions in the gardens of the Huntington Library, at the Watercourt at California Plaza, and in the L.A. Museum of Art; and a *Shakespeare Does Hollywood* gala that, for delegates representing more than forty countries from outside North America, may have stretched the meaning of "Shakespeare" in bewildering ways. We had soliloquies by Harry Hamlin and David Ogden Stiers but also a performance of "My Girl" by The Temptations. Somehow, Nancy assembled a glittering congress without major external funding yet without incurring debt.

As my last tax year closed, the SAA's assets had grown from the original \$41,128 to \$864,821. Most organizations our size, despite charging higher dues and fees, have investment portfolios at least three or four times larger than we do. But the contingency fund has made it possible for me to take the repeated leaps of faith involved in signing hotel contracts that include intimidating default and penalty clauses. In the instance of our return to Los Angeles in 2018, for example, cancellation would have cost us more than \$250,000; we agreed to redeem our host hotel's losses should we not satisfy our guest-room guarantee of \$310,620; and we pledged to spend \$115,000 on catering. Although we managed to emerge intact from the meetings in Minneapolis in 2002, when we failed to meet our contractual obligation, and in Victoria in 2003, when the SARS epidemic made travel seem hazardous, the experiences were sobering. My principal goal as the SAA's chief financial officer was to secure us against a return to the precarious fiscal position of the past, even were we to suffer a very bad conference year or relocation to a less generous host institution. The contingency fund has also enabled us to undertake significant redesigns of the website, pay annual membership dues to the ACLS and the National Humanities Alliance, and develop the many new, more member-oriented projects of recent years. With the fund, we have survived what L.A.'s "Masque of Gratitude" personified as Foul Weather and Budget Breaker(s).

The SAA has never attracted endowment funding, as is more common among academic societies with house journals to protect. Moreover, journal subscriptions incentivize continuous membership. Many SAA members pay dues only when planning to attend the conference. But the SAA has also been much leaner than our sister organizations. Unlike them, we have not contracted out our site planning and hotel negotiations, conference management, website maintenance, or bulletin and program design. The project of the contingency fund was deeply embedded in the administrative structure of the SAA over these past two decades, and it succeeded thanks to the dedication and determination of our staff. Terry Aylsworth and I learned the SAA together, and she set the tone from the beginning because hers was always a roll-up-your-sleeves and do-it-yourself attitude. The formidably well-organized Lee Tydings brought a new level of technical expertise without which we could not have introduced our first website. I wish that I had witnessed the Janice Delaney beat-down when she secured our nonprofit status in a District of Columbia office that rivalled its Department of Motor Vehicles for bureaucratic resistance. I have combed every hotel and catering invoice for deductions, but it was Bailey Yeager, fierce and indefatigable, who showed me that it was possible to secure discounts of more than fifty percent from audio-visual service providers. Bailey oversaw two website redesigns and negotiated for the first membership database that integrated with the site, yet the database system did not reveal its full potential

until the imaginative and exacting Bi-qi Beatrice Lei coerced it into yielding up its every capability. As nonprofits progressively lost tax exemptions in the tourism industry, Donna Even-Kesef scoured the laws of state after state with preternatural patience, securing tax relief that saved us thousands of dollars. Clare Mulligan not only ran the Atlanta meeting before completing a full month on the job, she also produced the conference program by teaching herself InDesign overnight – all without losing her (self-professed) Slytherin equilibrium and savvy sense of humor.

Many SAA members collaborated in the mission. Early on, in 2000, we launched an annual appeal that brings in between \$5,000 and \$25,000 a year; this has made it possible for us to maintain our program of travel grants. We also continue to call upon colleges and universities in the larger region of the conference as our co-hosts for receptions, performances, screenings, and concerts. The heads of the Local Arrangements Committees are the great heroes of the SAA. Michael Bristol persuaded his president at McGill University to single-handedly underwrite our Montréal reception in 2000, and Edward Berry did the same at the University of Victoria in 2003. Striking up a conversation with her seatmate on a short flight, Peggy Endel won a grant from Miami-Dade County that made it possible for us to hold our 2001 reception at the seaside Renaissance villa of Vizcaya, with its wandering classical guitarists and resident parrots; Mihoko Suzuki secured the catering funds.

There were 430 people at the Miami conference. Eleven years later, in Boston, we crossed the threshold of 1,000 attendees. Only in some aspects are there economies of scale in conference planning; more often, larger numbers mean higher costs. Thus, the goal of putting 2.5 glasses of wine in each conferee's hands has grown ever more challenging. In 2007, Bruce Smith devised the surefire fundraising strategy of offering a full page in the conference program to any school that would contribute \$5,000, a half-page for \$3,000. Suzanne Gossett set a new benchmark by collecting \$50,000 for the 2010 reception in Chicago. Bill Carroll, who had chaired Local Arrangements for the Boston meeting of 1988, stepped up again for that record-setting Boston meeting of 2012. Tom Bishop in Cleveland, Harry Berger in San Francisco, John Watkins in Minneapolis, Rebecca Bushnell and Margreta de Grazia in Philadelphia, Peter Herman and Bruce Smith in San Diego, Ann Christensen and Lars Engle and Amy Tigner in Dallas, Michael Shurgot in Bellevue, Lynne Magnusson in Toronto, Sara van den Berg in St. Louis, Patricia Cahill and Sheila Cavanagh in Atlanta, Julia Reinhard Lupton in Los Angeles – these were the valiant committee heads. Every institutional contribution happened because they or one of their committee members went to a chair or a dean or the head of a humanities center – sometimes all of them – to ask for underwriting. Some even made private contributions to ensure that their schools were represented as partners of the SAA.

The conference programs archived on the SAA website list the Local Arrangements teams. For New Orleans, there were ten committee members in 2004 and fifteen in 2016, with Catherine Loomis heading up both efforts. In 2004, she took all 643 of us to Blaine Kern's Mardi Gras World to wander through a collection of parade floats and have our cards read. In 2016, when we numbered 1,131, Catherine brought a brass band to the conference hotel for a jazz funeral marking the four-hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death. She was a principal mourner, Scott Oldenburg located the band, Hillary Eklund had the idea of importing the giant parade Shakespeare head, and Logan Browning provided funding and funeral handkerchiefs on behalf of the journal *SEL*. Catherine's students, who like to call themselves Loominaries, collected thousands of beads for us; I am glad to have Shakespeare conferences to which I can continue to wear my own Shakespeare-head pendant from the Rex Crewe's commemoration of 2016.

Our most essential institutional partners have been the University of Maryland Baltimore County and Georgetown University. At these institutions there were key people, too, especially Joanne Argersinger, Ken Baldwin, and Leeds Barroll at UMBC, and Richard Cronin, Chester Gillis, Karen

Lautman, Jane McAuliffe, James O'Donnell, Ricardo Ortiz, Jason Rosenblatt, Penn Szitty, and Kathryn Temple at Georgetown. UMBC paid salary and fringe benefits for a half-time staff assistant. In 2009 Georgetown authorized our first full-time hire with salary, benefits, and tuition remission. We have been given space and storage, photocopying and postage, office materials and equipment, legal counsel, access to library resources, advice from Human Resources managers, and IT support. All these were costs that membership dues would otherwise have had to finance. UMBC enabled us to launch the student travel grant program by underwriting it in its first year. With no local universities to call on in Bermuda, UMBC also funded our screening of the Derry Film Initiative *Hamlet*. We hosted a reception in 2015, despite a fundraising shortfall, thanks to a major contribution from Georgetown. When we had difficulty finding the right person to replace our Programs Manager in 2016, Georgetown gave us substantial bridge funding for added staff support.

In 2003, the New Zealand Film Commission helped us screen *The Maori Merchant of Venice*. For 2011, the accounting firm that prepares our tax statements *pro bono* alerted us to an estate fund from which we received a \$10,000 grant to underwrite the Bellevue residency of the Taiwan *Bangzi* Company, and Beatrice Lei secured thousands more from the Taiwanese government. In 2016, to mark the Shakespeare anniversary, we had a \$15,000 grant from the British Council. But the unexpected gifts that had the most significant impact on the SAA's long-term fiscal health were the early ones for a teaching workshop in Cleveland, for the reception in Miami, and from UMBC. These donations brought us to the turning point of 2001, when I hazarded that we could cover the next year's expenses with \$100,000 to spare. That \$100,000 was the start of an investment portfolio that was begun with guidance from Gail Kern Paster and that has benefitted enormously from subsequent growth in the stock market. This is how the SAA's asset balance grew twenty-one times over my term, reflecting an average growth rate (compounded) of 15.6 percent per year.

The work of stabilizing SAA finances unfolded against a continuing resolve to keep conference costs as low as possible for individual SAA members. As Leeds Barroll says in his own memoir of the early days, he conceived of the SAA as open to all, in distinction from the invitational conference that preceded us as an author-specific gathering. I was always impressed that so many newly elected trustees arrived to their first board meetings with such a strong sense of the SAA's essential character. Even as costs mounted, especially for audio-visual equipment and internet access, successive board members voted as conservatively as possible when setting membership dues and conference registration fees. They know that some SAA members are self-funding and that others have severely restricted travel resources.

Airfares are beyond our control, but we have had a strong hand in hotel rates. The business of site selection and contract negotiations are constitutionally charged to the executive director. Nancy Hodge made the arrangements for the Mayflower Hotel in 1997, with a room rate of \$99 per night. I finalized my last contract with the Hyatt Regency Denver for 2020, at a rate of \$159 per night – a \$60 increase across twenty-four years. Bargaining power is a function of registration numbers (larger conferences, like the MLA and the RSA, have the advantage here) and past history (which is why each year's rates are important). An SAA member once wrote me to challenge the organization to meet in a Motel 6, but I have yet to encounter a Motel 6 that has a ballroom seating 1,000. Meeting space is always a critical part of the calculation. Ann Cook wanted glamor for the SAA, and Nancy Hodge brought elegance. While we outgrew the Four Seasons and the Ritz-Carltons of the 1990s, I always aimed for good hotels in the hope that SAA members would feel that they were being treated well on their weekend escapes from regular duties.

Every meeting has had its own character, with Foul Weather occasionally looming large. In Montréal, a freak Sunday-morning blizzard confined us to the Queen Elizabeth Hotel for a bonus night of couldn't-be-helped conviviality. Tornadoes thwarted many SAAers en route to the Atlanta conference.

Some intrepid folk gave up on air travel and drove rental cars great distances; many arrived late; we rescheduled seminars and pressed on, survivors of the storm. Our plans for a reception on the pink-sand beaches of Bermuda were sadly diverted by rain, but the showers that threatened all day in Dallas held off until after our reception in the glorious grounds of the Nasher Sculpture Center. The next year, the cherry blossoms of Washington were at peak beauty on SAA weekend. Sometimes what was memorable was the plenary presentation when, as Dymyna Callaghan remarked, “you get to meet people in person that you’ve only known as texts.” Don Selwyn visited in 2003, Ong Keng Sen in 2009, Wendell Pierce in 2016, and Peter Sellars in 2018. Michael Almereyda screened *Hamlet 2000* in Montréal and returned for Los Angeles. We also showed Kenneth Branagh’s *As You Like It*, Joss Whedon’s *Much Ado About Nothing*, and dozens of other films. The group known first as ACTER and then as Actors From The London Stage was in residence in both its incarnations; the same was true for the Shenandoah Shakespeare Express, now the American Shakespeare Center. Also scheduled were field trips to rare book archives; vocal and instrumental concerts; and book launches for the Norton Shakespeare (first and second editions), the Oxford Middleton, and the Bedford Shakespeare. There were papers that inspired us, papers that riled us, seminars that were brilliant, seminars that were not, research partnerships forged in formal sessions, lifelong friendships begun in hotel bars. James Siemon and I co-authored the SAA T-shirt that remains my favorite. Designed for Minneapolis, it celebrated what was then thirty years of “aspiration, commodity, desire, emulation, faction, intrigue, invention, irony, malice, melancholy, mingling, mirth, policy, traffic, wonder.”

One constant across twenty-two meetings has been Jackie Hopkins. Jackie joined Terry Aylsworth at the registration tables for my first conference in 1997, and she has come every year since. Others who have served as the first faces of SAA registration were, from the UMBC years, Lee Tydings (succeeding Terry), Patty Hoke, and Julie Morris (who specialized in T-shirt sales). When the SAA moved to Georgetown, Donna Even-Kesef began supervising registration and the magnificent Anne O’Reilly joined the team. My conference job was to attend board meetings, and that of first Bailey Yeager and then Clare Mulligan was to be point person for hotel staff and service providers. Donna and Jackie and Anne were there for the membership. The grace note of the Los Angeles conference was that one SAAer paused to tell Jackie how much it means that she returns each year, always welcoming, always kind, and somehow recognizing so many by name.

This SAA member will have understood that the standards, ambitions, and achievements of our staff and of our membership are mutually reinforcing. I have felt fortunate every day of every year to work with such principled, efficient, resourceful, and good-humored folk. I would not have continued so long without the research leaves that were made possible by Sarah Greenleaf Whittier, Michele Osherow, and Bailey Yeager. Michele, my accomplished assistant director for some years, served as interim director twice. Succeeding Michele as assistant director, Joseph Navitsky moved the SAA forward through the Digital Room and other timely initiatives. Donna Even-Kesef was a trusted advisor and confidante for half of my time with the SAA; I wish I had enjoyed as long a partnership with the eminent Beatrice Lei and the unsinkable Clare Mulligan. My name has appeared on a great many SAA-issued letters in the past twenty-two years, but the name was always a stand-in for Terry, Lee, Michele, Donna, Janice, Bailey, Joe, Beatrice, and Clare.

I am also grateful for two decades with elected officers who thought of the SAA as a team effort and who valued the worth and work of the staff. Mine is a backstage account. For the real show, it is necessary to consult the online bulletins and programs documenting the panels, seminars, and workshops that emerged from the planning work of the trustees. Jean Howard has observed that “There is tremendous cultural capital attached to the name of Shakespeare; it has been invested with the labor of generations of editors, commentators, teachers, filmmakers, and directors.” The SAA is an artifact of that cultural capital, but it is a begetter, too, through the scholarly, pedagogical, and creative labor of

officers and members who have taken up what Susanne Wofford describes as our “special responsibility,” as Shakespeareans, for “the respect and influence of the humanities.”

In 1998, our opening reception was held in the historic Cleveland Arcade, a few blocks on a direct line from the conference hotel. I urged Tom Bishop, as head of local arrangements, to station a student at each corner nonetheless, to point the way. Tom was skeptical but characteristically obliging. “I told them ‘Go straight,’” he reported afterwards, “and I watched them turn left.” Twenty years later, as I walked through the Westin Bonaventure observing clusters of SAAers deep in conversation, I realized that this was what I would most miss about the SAA: the feeling that a place I had chosen was successful because my colleagues had forgotten where they were. They had taken their turns into thinking, learning, talking, sharing, and joining the generations of Shakespeare editors, commentators, and teachers. For me as for many, where we are together is our intellectual – and professional, and social – home.

28 May 2018