SUCCESS AND CHALLENGE: THE SOCIETY FOR HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY MOVES INTO THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

The Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA) has grown from fewer than 20 members in 1967 to well over 2,000 today. This vital organization primarily has a North American focus, but members hail from all over the globe. The mainstays of the society are its annual meeting, its well-respected publications Historical Archaeology and the SHA Newsletter, and a series of active committees focusing on internal and external programs. The SHA is led by officers and a board of directors, and overall society direction is shaped by a long range plan that is updated every five years. The Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology (ACUA) is one of the SHA's standing committees, and the chair of the ACUA sits on the SHA board of directors. Over the past decade, the SHA has become increasingly involved in shaping public policy in regard to historical archaeology through its Governmental Affairs Committee, and the recently formed SHA UNESCO Committee is active in tracking the progress of the UNESCO Draft Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage on an international level. Along with its successes, the SHA faces a number of serious challenges in the 21st century. These include international outreach, internal reorganization to meet the needs of an organization with increasing responsibilities to its members, and maintaining a balance between operational and publications costs and a desire to keep membership dues reasonable. Perhaps one of the clearest indicators of the society's "growing pains" is the debate among members about the temporal, geographic, and occupational boundaries of the field, which is played out at annual meetings, on the printed page, and over the internet.

Résumé

La Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA), qui comptait moins de 20 membres en 1967, en compte nettement plus de 2 000 aujourd'hui. Cette organisation dynamique est essentiellement axée sur l'Amérique du Nord, mais ses membres se recrutent aux quatre coins du monde. Les piliers de la société sont son assemblée annuelle, ses publications fort respectées-Historical Archaeology et le SHA Newsletter-et ses comités très actifs qui travaillent à l'interne et à l'externe. La SHA est dirigée par un conseil d'administration et doit son orientation générale à un plan à long terme mis à jour tous les cinq ans. L'Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology (ACUA) (conseil consultatif sur l'archéologie sous-marine) est un des comités permanents de la SHA, et son président siège au Conseil d'administration de la société. Depuis une décennie, la SHA intervient de plus en plus au niveau des politiques publiques en matière d'archéologie historique par l'entremise de son comité des affaires gouvernementales, et son comité de l'UNESCO, qui s'est constitué récemment, suit de près la rédaction du projet de convention de l'UNESCO sur la protection du patrimoine culturel sous-marin à l'échelle internationale. Si elle ne compte plus les succès, la SHA a plusieurs défis de taille à relever à l'aube du XXIe siècle. Elle doit faire connaître ses activités à l'échelle internationale, se réorganiser à l'interne pour s'acquitter de ses responsabilités croissantes envers ses membres et trouver un juste équilibre entre ses coûts d'exploitation et de publication d'une part et son désir de maintenir la cotisation de ses membres à un niveau raisonnable d'autre part. Peut-être un des signes les plus clairs des « douleurs de croissance » de la société est-il le débat à propos des limites temporelles, géographiques et professionnelles de l'archéologie historique qui fait rage parmi ses membres à l'occasion des assemblées annuelles, dans les publications et sur Internet.

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In this paper I'd like to introduce you to the Society for Historical Archaeology (SHA), relay a bit of its history, and tell you about the organization's current programs. I'll also briefly mention some of the challenges faced by the group as it moves into the 21st century.

Organized in 1967 with fewer than 20 people, the SHA today numbers over 2,000 members. It is a scholarly organization dedicated to "the study — through the use of material and written evidence — of peoples and cultures that existed during the period of recorded history" (from a career brochure recently published by the society for an undergraduate audience). Membership is open (if one agrees to abide by the society's ethical positions), and has several categories: adjunct, student, regular, benefactor, and life. Dues are reasonable. The most common categories are student ($40 or $20 U.S., depending on which country you live in) and regular ($75 U.S.). The benefits of membership include a subscription to the society's journal, *Historical Archaeology,* and to the *SHA Newsletter.* Members are also entitled to vote on society business, hold office, serve on committees, and participate in the annual conference at member rates. Although much of the society's work is carried out by dedicated volunteers, the business office is currently run by Backcountry Archaeological Services, a contractor based in Tucson, Arizona.

The SHA also maintains a website at www.sha.org, which as of May 2000 had almost 37,000 "hits"; publishes useful "nonentitlement" publications such as readers (for classroom and reference use); and makes past issues of the journal available on CD-ROM. One of the society's newest publications is *Studies in Material Culture Research,* edited by Karlis Karklins (2000), which features papers prepared by material culture specialists from Parks Canada. The volume is intended for use by archaeologists, material culture researchers, and others who deal with materials recovered from historical-period sites.

The society's mission is to promote archaeological and historical studies by advocating scientific research, interdisciplinary cooperation, professional standards, conservation of historical resources, and dissemination of knowledge. From this mission statement, eight standing goals guide the work of the society. These include:

- To advocate protection and conservation of archaeological resources.
- To foster high professional standards among archaeologists.
- To promote broad and timely dissemination of knowledge.
- To educate the public, students, professionals, and government regarding the ideals and standards of historical archaeology.
- To increase funding for archaeology and job opportunities for archaeologists.
- To encourage cooperation within The Society for Historical Archaeology and with other related professions and organizations.
- To manage the society effectively.
- To encourage membership in the society by all those working in or interested in historical archaeology.

To help achieve the goals of the society, a long-range plan was developed in the late 1980s. It is currently being updated.

A board of directors, consisting of 13 individuals governs the organization: president, president-elect, immediate past president, secretary-treasurer, six directors, editor, newsletter editor, and chair of the Advisory Council on Underwater Archaeology (ACUA). Eleven positions are elected by the membership (the chair of the ACUA is elected by that body from the pool of members elected by the SHA membership and appoints the editor and newsletter editor). Each of the presidential officers serves for one year; the

remaining officers and board members serve for three-year terms. In order to help the board of directors accomplish the society's goals, committees were established. SHA has "standing" and "presidential" committees. Procedures for society governance are outlined in a policy and procedures manual, which is updated periodically.

Standing committees are mandated in the society's bylaws and are generally concerned with the Goal — to manage the society effectively (e.g., Budget Committee, Nominations and Elections Committee, Editorial Advisory Committee, and Newsletter Editorial Advisory Committee). The ACUA and Conference Committee are also identified in the bylaws. Standing committees often have predetermined membership. For example, the secretary-treasurer serves as chair of the Budget Committee, and the immediate past president chairs the Nominations and Elections Committee.

The purpose of the first four committees is self-explanatory: to keep the society fiscally sound, ensure that the governance structure is maintained, and maintain high quality and timely publications (which are the primary benefit of membership). The Conference Committee is responsible for general oversight and development of the society's annual conferences. The annual conference increases in importance each year. It provides an opportunity for the membership to meet, learn (by attending continuing education workshops), and exchange scholarly information. Another important function of the conference is to provide income for the society. Even so, the society's leadership and the conference planners have tried very hard over the years to make conferences affordable. That is one reason that the meetings are generally held in early January, when room rates are lower than at other times of the year. Another reason is to accommodate academic vacation schedules. A very high proportion of the membership attends the annual meeting. In January 2000 in Quebec, approximately 1,200 persons were in attendance — over one-half of the membership! Prior to Quebec, some recent conference locations included Salt Lake City, Cincinnati, Corpus Christi, Vancouver, Kansas City, and Jamaica. In 2001, the annual meeting will be held aboard the (docked) *Queen Mary,* in Long Beach, California.

Since 1987, the ACUA has been a formal committee of the SHA, and since 1970 the group has been conceiving and organizing sessions on underwater topics at the SHA annual meeting. Through time, the contribution of the underwater portions of the meetings became regarded as significant enough so that in 1987 the name was changed to the SHA Conference on Historical and Underwater Archaeology. In addition to working on the conference each year with SHA, ACUA works to educate and advise scholars, governments, sport divers, and the general public on issues relating to underwater archaeology, conservation, and submerged cultural resource management. Over the years, the ACUA and SHA have had an inconsistent relationship, partly because of the diverse backgrounds represented by practitioners of underwater and terrestrial archaeology. In recent years, however, the council's activities have become more closely linked with those of SHA, to everyone's benefit.

For years, a selection of underwater papers presented at the annual meeting has been published, first as proceedings and later as part of the SHA series entitled *Underwater Archaeology.* The latter series has been discontinued, but the society still hopes to publish peer-reviewed papers on underwater topics in the journal or as a special issue. Other recent ACUA accomplishments include compilation of a notebook entitled *Protecting Underwater Archaeological Sites: An Information Notebook,* in response to many requests for information both nationally and internationally. The notebook is periodically updated. In 1998, ACUA completed a brochure on underwater archaeology; 1,300 were distributed worldwide to governmental agencies, maritime museums, sport diving magazines, technical diving groups, universities with underwater archaeological programs, and both public and private institutes. Plans are underway to translate

the brochure into languages other than English. The ACUA has worked very hard to contribute to many of the society's standing goals, and their efforts are beginning to have international impacts.

Presidential committees are committees formed by the president to accomplish tasks in a particular area. Many of these committees were formed to carry out particular standing goals of the society. There are currently 15 active presidential committees. It is impossible to thoroughly detail the accomplishments of each in this venue; here I'll focus on a few of the most visible committee activities. Most of these committees report regularly in the *SHA Newsletter,* in case anyone would like more information. Board activities often dovetail with the work of the committees, and highlights are presented below.

The Academic and Professional Training Committee (APTC) was established to promote the teaching of historical archaeology in academic settings and to foster the continued career training of historical archaeologists. For the past several years, the Continuing Education Coordinator, whose position falls under this committee, has planned and implemented continuing-education workshops at the annual meeting. For the past two years, ACUA also sponsored artifact-conservation workshops as part of this program. The committee also annually compiles the "Guide to Higher Education in Historical Archaeology," which appears on the society's website and in the *SHA Newsletter,* and assembles course syllabi for posting on the website. The APTC has a very active student subcommittee, and each year the committee sponsors a forum on student-related career topics at the annual meeting. In past years, the committee has produced a "Careers in Historical Archaeology" brochure. The society's Employment Coordinator is also a member of this committee, and she works to match up employers with prospective employees. Job notices are now posted regularly on the SHA website.

The Awards Committee is responsible for selecting recipients of the society's awards, which are generally presented at the annual meeting. Awards range from merit awards, to a distinguished service award, to the J. C. Harrington Medal, which is the society's highest tribute to a historical archaeologist who has made a lasting, significant contribution to the discipline throughout his or her career. The recently established John L. Cotter award was awarded for the first time at the Quebec meeting. This award is intended to honor a historical archaeologist at the beginning of his or her career for a single, truly outstanding achievement. One might say that a well-established awards program in a particular discipline indicates a healthy, mature or maturing field of study.

The Business Office Oversight Committee was initially established to review the operation of the business office to ensure that the society's interests were being met and that no conflicts of interest occurred. The committee is presently overseeing the selection of a new business-office-services provider for the society.

The Curation, Conservation, and Collections Management Committee is responsible for advising the society on issues and policies relating to the management of historical and archaeological collections and records. The committee is finalizing a publication on curation and collections management that will be published by the society with funds from an outside source. Another pressing task assigned to this committee is to work with the History Committee (see below) to devise a policy for management of SHA materials, including records.

The Development Committee was established to work with committees to obtain funding from outside sources. The committee recently helped to restructure membership levels in order to allow more opportunities for donations.

The Gender and Minority Affairs Committee was established as a means to ensure that issues relevant to women and minorities are presented to the board and given all due consideration in society deliberations.

The Governmental Affairs Committee is responsible for monitoring proposed and existing legislation, regulations, guidelines, and other policies that affect the society, its members, or the profession. Members of this committee have been asked to testify in support of proposed legislation, and the group frequently identifies advocacy issues that require board action. The society also frequently joins with other organizations, such as the SAA and the American Institute of Archaeology (AIA), to support worthy archaeological causes. Current SHA President Susan Henry Renaud recently appointed newly elected board member William Moss, of Design et Patrimoine, Ville de Québec, to this committee, in the hopes that the focus of the committee would become more international.

One of the SHA's newest committees is the History Committee, which was established to oversee documentation of the society's history. The position of society archivist is now subsumed within this committee, and some oral history work has been conducted with some of the society's founding "mothers" and "fathers".

The Inter-Society Relations Committee functions to open lines of communication between the society and other organizations that have related or mutual interests. Currently, the SHA has representatives to over 30 organizations. The most recent additions are representatives to the Alaska Anthropological Association and to Canadian archaeological organizations (collectively). Each year, this committee sponsors sessions and sets up displays at various meetings held by sister organizations. On a related note, each year the SHA president attends one or two meetings of the presidents of various archaeological and anthropological societies. These meetings are an opportunity for the society to establish and strengthen ties and increase avenues of communication between like-minded organizations. In 2001, the presidents will meet on the *Queen Mary* during the SHA annual meeting. A final example of inter-society outreach is the recent series of joint meetings held by the SHA and the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology in 1997 to celebrate the 30-year anniversaries of each organization. One meeting was held in Colonial Williamsburg, and the other was held in London. A joint publication resulted (Egan and Michael 1999).

The Long Range Planning Committee was established to assist in defining the goals and scheduling the actions detailed in the plan for implementation. The committee is responsible for keeping the plan current by reviewing and updating the document periodically in consultation with the board of directors. The plan contains specific action items for each SHA committee and helps to keep the entire organization focused on its goals. Review and revision of the plan are currently underway.

The Membership Committee functions to promote membership in the society. The group primarily focuses on recruitment of new members, but is also concerned with the retention of current members, reinstatement of former members, and evaluation of member benefits and services. This committee frequently works with the Inter-Society Relations Committee to take the society's display to meetings. The committee is developing a new, more portable display that will be used at regional and other meetings. In 1998, also under the auspices of this committee, the society conducted a survey of its membership to obtain a more accurate demographic profile and to learn how members felt about society services and goals (DeCorse and DiSanto 1999). The survey employed a nonrandom, census sampling method. Two thousand surveys were mailed, and 804 responses were obtained.

The Public Education and Information Committee (PEIC) is responsible for disseminating information about historical archaeology to the public. The PEIC has traditionally been heavily involved in designing and implementing the public session held at the annual meeting. In addition, committee members are also currently developing multimedia materials (website, CD-ROM) for "Unlocking the Past," a project geared toward a popular audience.

In 1999, presidential discretionary funds were used to support a telephone survey that was commissioned by a coalition of archaeological organizations and designed to elicit information on the American public's perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes about archaeology. The SHA was involved from the outset and helped develop the questionnaire and review the results, which were prepared by Harris Interactive. The results are heartening. According to the survey, Americans support the goals and practice of archaeology, believe it is important in today's world, and endorse laws protecting sites and artifacts. Happily for historical archaeology, the public seems to be aware that archaeologists study the historical period, particularly the very recent past. Unfortunately, many misconceptions still persist about the discipline. The board continues to use the results of this survey to inform the work of relevant society committees. To view the complete report of the survey, visit the SAA website (www.saa.org) and go to the "Harris Interactive Poll" on the Public Relations portion of the site.

The Standards and Ethics Committee provides guidance regarding the standards of performance appropriate to the practice of historical archaeology. The committee is currently preparing more inclusive standards. In addition, Article VII of the society's bylaws affirms the group's ethical positions. The society supports the conservation, preservation, and study of archaeological resources, including both terrestrial and underwater remains. It is strongly opposed to the collecting, exchanging, buying, or selling of archaeological artifacts and research data for the purpose of personal satisfaction. Dissemination of research results is strongly advocated, within the society itself, but also to related disciplines and to the public. All publications and presentations sponsored by the society are reviewed for conformity with the society's policies.

One of the most significant actions of the SHA over the past several years was when the membership voted to become one of the sponsoring (and supporting) organizations of the Register of Professional Archaeologists, along with the AIA and the SAA. All SHA members are strongly urged to submit an application to the register, if they have not already done so (see the SHA website for a link to the Register's website).

The UNESCO Committee is one of the society's newest committees, only being formed in 1998. Its charge is to monitor the development and revision of UNESCO's draft Convention on the Protection of Underwater Cultural Heritage, and to recommend society position statements on relevant related issues. Last April, the society sent ACUA chair Toni Carrell to a meeting of experts held by UNESCO in Paris to discuss the most recent draft convention. Another meeting was held this July in Paris, and Dr. Carrell again represented the society.

Now that I've highlighted some of the society's recent programs and accomplishments, I would strongly invite you to join if you are at all interested in an archaeology that combines the material and documentary records. The society is active and dynamic, but is certainly facing several challenges as it moves into the 21st century.

One of the most significant challenges concerns infrastructure. The society is becoming more complex and has greater financial requirements. We have been fortunate to have key officers who have provided

stability to the organization through their long-term service to the organization (e.g., the current secretary-treasurer has been in office since 1978, and the editor since the same year!). On the other hand, having a president serve for only one year makes it extremely difficult to complete anything that is not a short-term project and limits the possibility for continuity as relationships develop with other societies. The society is currently reviewing its structure to determine if adjustments are needed for the health of the organization.

The society's leadership has always been acutely aware of the need to provide reasonably priced services to its members. While the organization is in excellent financial health, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain funding levels for already existing programs, such as publications, and at the same time expand the work of the committees. In my opinion, the society must become more creative and aggressive in searching out funding for projects and services.

Finally, society membership seems to have reached a plateau. It may be instructive to think about the composition of the society (from data taken from the 1998 membership survey). Over 90% of SHA members are U.S. citizens, and 75% are white. Almost 50% of SHA members have master's degrees, and 36% have doctorates. Interestingly, 49% received their degrees in anthropology and 28% in archaeology. A total of 16% marked "other", which included degrees ranging from cultural resource management, education, law, and engineering to public policy and international relations. Only 7% marked history as their degree field. It is clear from this breakdown that the society would benefit from a diversification of membership. As an organization, we are attempting, with some success, to internationalize. A Canadian now sits on the board of directors, the most recent annual meeting was held outside of the United States, articles for *Historical Archaeology* are evaluated as to their relevance to an international audience, and international participation is being sought on all committees.

All scholarly societies are faced with the challenge of being relevant in today's world. The society is active on the public front, but should continue to expand programs in these areas. From my perspective, the SHA is still the exciting organization I joined almost two decades ago. It is small enough to remain personally responsive to its membership, but large enough to be one of the major players on the global "players" on the archaeological scene. I invite you to look at us more closely and to consider becoming a member. Thank you!

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