A California Love Story—Professional and Personal

Lee W. Formwalt

As our thoughts turn to the annual meeting and California, this year’s speakers will have a chance to reflect on their experiences in California, and to think about how the state continues to shape their work.

Indeed, when I was growing up, histories were written and taught to exclude rather than include those groups. I realized that the founding fathers/mothers did not look like me. And so, like Alex Haley, I was forced to search for my own roots as an American of Japanese ancestry.

Upon completion of a master’s degree in Japanese studies from the University of Michigan, I received a scholarship to study in Japan. There she met Don.

Donald Teruo Hata was born in East Los Angeles two years before Nadine. At the age of three, this California native and U.S. citizen was rounded up as a political prisoner and hauled off to the “U.S. War Relocation Authority concentration camp for persons of Japanese ancestry (WRA Fk 31/14) at Gila River, Arizona.” From 1942 to 1945, he was officially prisoner #40451C, denied due process and “guilty by reason of race.” His work as a migrant child laborer with other Nisei (Japanese American) inmates and reservation Indians in rural Arizona, Colorado and Utah, made an indelible imprint on him and changed him for the rest of his life. After the war, he returned to southern California where he was a “full-time student with a variety of full and part-time jobs (K-12 through graduate school)” including working as a “gardener’s assistant” (low hedge and lawn edge trimmer), grocery store stock clerk and cashier, and door-to-door cooking ware salesperson.”

He went to the University of Southern California, where he majored in history, graduating with a B.A. in 1962 and an M.A. in Asian Studies in 1964.

After returning from Japan with his new fiancee, Don went back to USC where, in 1970, he earned his Ph.D. in modern Japanese history. That year he landed a position in Japan as a part-time faculty member. In 1974, he earned his Ph.D. in modern Japanese history. That year he landed a position in Japan as a part-time faculty member. In 1974, he joined the faculty at the University of California, San Diego, and in 1977, he became the director of the Center for Japanese Studies.

As Nadine points out, “More than half of this country’s undergraduate students are enrolled in a community college. This may be the last opportunity for them to take a course which provides historical perspectives which should stand them in good stead for whatever job they undertake. These men and women are the bedrock of our communities; their contributions and successes epitomize what is so special about good teaching at the community college and lower division levels. How many plumbers, construction workers, and health care professionals have you met who love history and read history because of their history teachers?”

I asked Nadine when she looked back over her career what her proudest accomplishment was. “Playing a role,” she replied, “in improving the quality of teaching and learning both at my home institution and through larger organizations by demanding that community college faculty be treated as equal partners by faculty and administrators and professional organizations and by insisting that community college faculty remain current with the research, become involved in professional activities, and conduct scholarly research themselves so that there is no excuse for their being treated like second class citizens.”

As a community college advocate, she served on the California State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights during the 1970s; “I was particularly proud of our public hearings and published reports on civil rights issues confronting Asian and Pacific Americans. At the same time I was appointed by the governor to the State Historic Resources Commission, where I supported official historic site designations for World War II incarceration camps for Japanese Americans, and pushed for more sites reflecting the multicultural history of California—including a published survey of minority sites.”

Nadine and Don Hata have a strong affection for OAH and, in fact, have included the organization in their estate plans. As she reflected on her appreciation of the organization, she noted that OAH is “inclusionary”—“they treated me as an equal; they put me on the Executive Director selection committee. I chaired the community college task force and was given no agenda other than to find out what OAH could do for community college faculty.” She received support from both the executive board and executive office and “the executive leadership turned the
Opening the Convention

John R. Dichtl

Ten years ago the OAH Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., had as its theme, "Widening the Circle of History." One of the meeting's themes was "Historians and their Public." It is a similar motif, but one that demonstrates a decade of expansive thinking about how and where historians do their work and the audiences that historians are trying to reach. The 2005 Annual Meeting acknowledges that the circle of history has widened and looks outward from that center. It examines how many ways historians in different venues connect to and serve a variety of audiences, each of which is public in some sense.

Best exemplifying this spirit is the 2005 Program Committee's plan to have all sessions on Friday afternoon take place outside the convention hotel, in the historic neighborhoods of San Francisco and the surrounding Bay Area. The schedule of events allows time for lunch beforehand near or en route to each offsite location, whether it be Mission Pacific Presidio, the Chinese Historical Society of America, Alcatraz, the Presidio, the Bancroft Library at Berkeley, the Oakland Museum of California, the African American Art and Culture Complex, the GLBT Historical Society, or the San Francisco Public Library. Conference goers will find the staff at many of these venues willing to provide tours of their facilities or access to their collections. To reach a larger audience, each session will be open to the general public.

The two plenary sessions of the convention, also open to the public, explore the connections between U.S. history and the history of the Pacific Rim. On Thursday evening, John Dower addresses U.S. involvement in the Pacific during the twentieth century with comments by Gordon Chang and Carol Gluck. Friday night's plenary marks the 30th anniversary of the Vietnam War with a discussion by Frances Fitzgerald, Dung Van Mai Elliott, David Maraniss, and Daniel Ellsberg. Other thematic sessions connecting sessions across the meeting include California history, the West, the American military role in the world, and immigration and citizenship.

State of the Field sessions at the annual meeting also provide an opportunity for conversations across specialties. We created this type of session five years ago to help scholars and teachers not deeply immersed in a particular subfield to understand how it has developed over the last twenty years. Conference attendees this year may choose from state of the field sessions on Economic History, Ethnohistory of North American Regions, Intelligence History, Migration and Ethnic History, Spanish Borderlands, Visual and Material Culture, Ethnohistorical Theory, Atlantic World, Rural History, and Race as a Historical Concept.

A vibrant area of continuing improvement in the annual meeting over the past decade is the participation of K-12 teachers and the scheduling of events that promote collaboration between historians and K-12 faculty. Ten years ago in Washington, D.C., the OAH offered "Focus on Teaching Day." In San Francisco there will be teaching sessions and events spread across all four days of the meeting, and many panels include a mix of precollege teachers, college/university faculty and other historians. Travel grants of up to $400 from the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History will help fifty teachers attend the convention this year. Teachers will be able to claim certificates of professional development verifying their participation in the meeting. And now this year will be a Teacher Hospitality Center where K-12 educators and others interested in precollege teaching will be welcomed with refreshments and informal discussion with colleagues. The center will be located in the busy hub of the book exhibit hall. From the session panels to the hospitality center, the underlying current is collaboration among historians and precollege teachers.

Another innovation this year, which reinforces the ways historians are trying to reach broader audiences and develop allies along the way, is the inauguration of the OAH Friend of History Award. It is given in recognition of an individual or organization outside the historical profession that has demonstrated support for history. The OAH prizes and awards ceremony takes place immediately before James O. Horton's presidential address, "Public History in Public Service." To draw a wider swath of meeting participants, the OAH president's address for the first time will be on Saturday afternoon rather than in the evening.

Three additional sets of events during the 2005 meeting reflect OAH's goal of encouraging historians, teachers, and other history professionals to be aware of "their publics" and through collaboration to reach broader audiences. OAH itself is partnering with the National Park Service, Palgrave Macmillan, and the College Board Advanced Placement History Program. For two and a half days prior to our conference, National Park Service (NPS) historians from around the country will participate in a preconference meeting in the OAH convention space. Historians and interpretive staff have made exciting changes throughout NPS and at the many sites under its care. The history-related sites in the park system alone receive more than seventy-five million visitors each year. Conference goers who want a behind-the-scenes look at an exciting feature site should register for the all-day tour, presentations, and discussions at the Rosie the Riveter/World War II Homefront National Historical Park in Richmond, California. (See page 13 of the Program. For more information or to make reservations, contact Heather Huyck at <Heather_Huyck@nps.gov>.)

While some history consumers will visit historical parks, other members of the general public will choose to pick up a good book. To reach this broader reading audience, OAH and the publisher Palgrave Macmillan have launched a book project taking shape at the OAH. A second OAH book project taking shape at the OAH is a collection of the essays already appearing in the OAH Magazine of History and on the AP Central web site as a series called "America on the World Stage." Each article takes a significant subject in American history and places it in international context, and all within the framework of a high school or college level U.S. survey course. The Ad Hoc OAH-AP Joint Advisory Board on Teaching the U.S. History Survey, chaired by Gary Reichard, is serving as the editorial board for this project and will be offering a session about the essay series on Saturday afternoon.

All of these initiatives to improve how we engage our "publics" begin with that impulse to "widen the circle of history," a long-running endeavor to increase our understanding of the past by including a greater variety of subject matter, methodologies, venues, and practitioners. The 2005 meeting offers us a chance to step back and assess our progress.

Temporary task force into a permanent standing committee.

OAH published the pioneering work she edited on the status of community college historians in 1999. I asked Nadine and Don why they decided to exclude OAH in their estate planning. Nadine replied that she and Don were both committed to the importance of undergraduate teaching (in 1990, Don won the California State University Trustees' systemwide Outstanding Professor award) and appreciated OAH's efforts to promote the highest quality of teaching at all levels. Furthermore, "we both believe in OAH's commitment to globalizing/internationalizing teaching and research in U.S. history. OAH's executive directors and elected leadership have been innovative in thinking outside the box, and shown courage and commitment to their convictions: Arnita Jones and Larry Levine established the community college task force and allowed us to determine our own destiny; Lee Formwalt stood up to be counted on the St Louis/Adams Mark controversy; David Montgomery, Linda Kerber and others have demonstrated courage of convictions in the search of the truth and to do the right thing—including reaching out and treating two-year college historians as equal partners in improving the quality of the research and teaching of undergraduate history."

Nadine had experienced a recurrence of her cancer and she wanted to discuss her struggle with the disease "for a number of reasons—all educational: When I had my mastectomy seven years ago, we both were shocked to learn that women across our campus—from Ph.D. faculty to secretaries and custodians—were astounded that I went public about why I was absent for several months. They were afraid of the stigma that continues to pervade the workplace—fears that cancer might have a negative influence on promotion or reten­tion. I formed an informal support group that, over the past seven years, has cut across the rigid (albeit never publicly acknowledged) hierarchy of the campus community. That group has evolved from a superficial 'survivor's' luncheon to an increasingly serious exchange of grim facts such as my case of metastasized cancer. Faculty have gained the support of off-campus groups that provide free marmograms; others provide information about free wigs and other support services. I am convinced that job-related stress is linked to reduced immunity, and thus the ominous hypothesis that women with multiple sources of stress are targets for cancer. As my hair fell out, we discovered the total disconnect between reality and vanity. Have you seen the thriving commerce in incredibly ugly cancer hats? I followed the lead of one of my courageous faculty who simply tied on a small triangular bandana to shield her sensitive bald head from the sun. Her students were startled at first, but they got a lesson in reality. When I adopted the same posture as Vice President for Academic Affairs, I was inundated by emails and phone calls from women across the campus, thanking me for setting a standard that allowed them to come out of the closet. Health related inequities," Nadine concluded, "have now superseded gender and racial-ethnic issues in our priorities for future activism."

Nadine and Don Hata have faced many struggles in their lives and careers. Their example of courage in the face of discrimination, hatred, and even deadly disease is a high standard for us to emulate. Through it all, their love of the past and of each other has really made the difference.

Lee W. Formwalt is OAH executive director.

February 2005 OAH NEWSLETTER • 9