

**Ann Jennalie Cook**  
**The Shakespeare Association: A Personal Memoir**

My involvement with the Shakespeare Association goes back almost to its very beginning. While I did not attend the 1971 World Conference in Vancouver, where the call went out to form scholarly organizations in English-speaking countries, the next year I became a colleague of Leeds Barroll. From his Shakespeare Center at the University of South Carolina, he launched the SAA. He invited me to present a paper at the first Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C., during the spring of 1973, and I have attended every meeting since then. From the outset, Leeds combined promising young scholars like me and Barry Gaines with long-established figures of towering reputation. Just as adroitly, he created the first Board of Trustees with men and women from throughout the country rather than concentrating on well-established cliques associated with particular institutions.

Shortly after the second Annual Meeting in Pasadena, Leeds became Deputy Director of the National Endowment for the Humanities. His new position meant that he could not continue as Executive Secretary of the SAA because the organization had applied to the NEH for a Bicentennial Conference grant to help finance the "Shakespeare in America" World Congress of 1976. He sent me to approach the Rockefeller Foundation for a supporting grant, which was awarded, and then pulled a major coup on my behalf. He convinced the Trustees at the New Haven meeting in 1975 that they should trust an obscure individual who had never organized a scholarly conference with the title of Acting Executive Director and the task of managing the Congress. At the time, I thought chairing the session with Ian Richardson marked the highlight of my fledgling career. How could I have imagined the adventures that lay ahead?

From the distance of thirty-five years and seven World Congresses, it now seems impossible that we put together the glittering Washington event in a mere twelve months. Fortunately, we had the full cooperation and prestige of the Folger Shakespeare Library, discreet advice from Leeds Barroll, and guidance from Levi Fox, head of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and Secretary-Treasurer for the International Shakespeare Association. Most importantly, the SAA President, Maynard Mack, took the random collection of ideas advanced by the Trustees at the first planning meeting and shaped them into a coherent program. His name on letters of invitation, together with that of the ISA President, Kenneth Muir, carried all the weight my own name did not. To secure plenary speakers like Alastair Cook, Jorge Luis Borges, Anthony Burgess, Joel Hurstfield, and Alfred Harbage, as well as presentations by Joseph Papp, Angus Bowmer, Anthony Quayle, and Michael Kahn constituted an improbable triumph.

With cherry blossoms in full bloom, Washington welcomed the Shakespearean world with one dazzling affair after another. A reception in the formal rooms of the State Department. A black-tie dinner at the Folger. A cocktail party at the Smithsonian castle. A service from the Elizabethan Book of Common Prayer at the National Cathedral. A garden party at the British Embassy. Dozens of other private dinners, diplomatic receptions, VIP luncheons in the executive suite at the Hilton, National Public Radio interviews, and ample press coverage. Not to mention the one-man performance of Wilson Knight at Georgetown University in which he donned a campy wig as Romeo and stripped down to a diaper as Timon. Quite spontaneously, a Washington socialite from Texas brought a busload of Shakespeare scholars to her home for

barbecue and souvenir ten-gallon hats. (For a far more detailed and amusing account, consult Stephen Booth's review in the *Shakespeare Quarterly* for 1976.)

Behind the scenes and before the Congress, we allocated money to ensure truly global representation. We dealt with bruised, fragile, or over-inflated egos. We managed with a staff of one, my extraordinary assistant, Bruce Tucker. Yet we made decisions that would forever reshape the landscape of Shakespeare scholarship, most notably the seminar system. The idea originated with me. Having seen job opportunities dwindle in the early 1970s, I felt the profession needed a venue to exchange ideas on specialized topics. It seemed feasible to me that a cross-country seminar, directed by a respected authority, could produce serious research papers, circulate and read them in advance, and then take a couple of hours to discuss the issues they raised. At the first Congress program meeting, the Trustees approved the idea, in part because I argued that seminars would provide more places for noted scholars to take part and also secure funding for more attendees.

For 1976 and the next few years, we tapped chairs whose reputations would attract enrollees but gave the leaders the right to invite up to half the fifteen or so participants in order to ensure the quality of the work produced. However, the rest of the places had to remain open to any member who signed up. In practice, the seminars not only discovered talented researchers in many unlikely places but also promoted the early careers of some who might never have considered publication of their ideas. It soon became increasingly important to head seminars with people who had some experience with the new format in order to develop a system that allowed for full involvement of all members of the group, that did not merely summarize papers already read, and that did not play to auditors. At the 1976 Congress, the initial decision to keep seminars closed to observers met with such opposition that this rule swiftly disappeared. On balance, the new forum, now widely copied, represented a fundamental change in the structure and inclusiveness of professional meetings.

The seminars became so closely identified with the SAA that for decades, our Trustees took charge of that part of the program for the ensuing ISA World Congresses. The two organizations initially had an interdependent relationship that resulted partly from their virtually simultaneous formation in response to the resolutions of the first Congress at Vancouver in 1971. Leeds Barroll took the lead in America, while Levi Fox acted to set up a globally inclusive group headquartered at the Shakespeare Centre of the Birthplace Trust in Stratford-upon-Avon. Without an invitation from the SAA to host another Congress in 1996 and the generous funding secured to underwrite it, the ISA probably would not have survived. Even their second gathering in 1981 served as the SAA's Annual Meeting in addition to its international scope. From the beginning, North Americans have usually represented the largest contingent of participants, though not until 1996 did they again host an ISA Congress.

Structurally, the SAA Trustees made another significant change during the 1976 meeting. The original By-Laws called for the Executive Secretary to be a Trustee, potentially requiring a new appointment every three years as well as a change of the organization's offices every three years, not to mention the difficulty of getting someone to take on a demanding but unpaid responsibility. Leeds proposed an amendment that would make the Executive Secretary a position appointed by the Trustees, and he graciously suggested that I fill this position. That

amendment, duly passed, resulted in a stable continuity for the SAA that still exists. I served twelve years from 1975 to 1987, Nancy Elizabeth Hodge served nine years from 1987 to 1996, and Lena Cowen Orlin has served ever since.

After the extravagant Washington Congress, the SAA meetings settled down to smaller gatherings, intentionally scheduled at elegant hotels in interesting cities—the Fairmont in New Orleans (1977), the Sir Francis Drake in San Francisco (1979), the Marquette in Minneapolis (1982), the Vanderbilt Plaza in Nashville (1985), the Ritz-Carlton in Montreal (1986), the Four Seasons in Seattle (1987), to name just a few. I felt that members should regard attendance as a weekend vacation with good food, good service, good friends, and good sessions, not a dreary, boring experience in shabby surroundings, endured solely for the sake of one's professional advancement. The luncheon menus aimed at excellent, if not gourmet, fare, while the opening receptions increasingly set a higher level of entertainment. Combining support from several area institutions rather than strictly local ones, a practice begun in 1984 at Nashville, has enlarged the budget as well as the choice of locale for such events.

Earlier excursions, now impossible with SAA attendance approaching 1,000, could transport members via streetcar to the Tulane President's home (New Orleans, 1977), via bus to hear the Fisk Jubilee Singers and then to a Southern feast featuring Goo-Goo Clusters at the Vanderbilt Chancellor's home (Nashville, 1985), or via ferry and bus (one of which got lost) to enjoy fresh roasted salmon at the Kiana Lodge (Seattle, 1987). Singularly, the Malone Society Dance, featuring music by the Hey Nonny Nonnies, has remained a unique contribution to the proceedings since its origin in the fertile brain of Tom Berger, following his earlier Malone Society Fun Run in Minneapolis (1982) and subsequent Malone Society cocktail parties. In no other literary or professional gathering can members see one another execute so many improbable gyrations—and pay for the privilege.

The Dance has taken its place alongside more sedate events of the Annual Meeting. For the first several years, an Annual Lecture, delivered by such famed scholars as G. K. Hunter, G. E. Bentley, and Madeleine Doran, formed part of every year's gathering, but that custom has given way to the President's address during the Friday luncheon. Since Leeds Barroll's brilliantly droll explication of what he would have said had his computer not destroyed his remarks (1986), each outgoing President agonizes over an appropriate level of humor, inspiration, insight, and/or adequacy for that occasion. Workshops for members to provide training in specific areas of expertise became part of the program in 1987, and workshops for area teachers frequently accompanied SAA meetings. Informal, voluntary play readings, initiated by Chuck Shattuck (1979), have surfaced from time to time, as did a notable series of pre-prepared performances of plays directed by Audrey Stanley.

Enduringly, the realm of performance has met the realm of scholarship at the SAA. Besides the presentation of Ian Richardson, which I chaired in 1975, and the presence of outstanding American directors at the 1976 World Congress, such figures as Patrick Stewart, Lisa Harrow, Tony Church, Nicholas Pennell, and Kristin Linklater have graced the proceedings. The BBC-TV series were routinely showed as each season came available, and live performances ranged from *The Revenger's Tragedy* at Berkeley (1979) to *Fortinbras Gets Drunk* at Vanderbilt (1985). Seminar topics from the beginning often focused on film or acting

companies or aspects of modern production as well as theater history, but the continuing dialogue has steadily moved aspects of performance criticism to the fore in all the SAA's formats. By 1983, members happily traveled to Ashland, where the Oregon Shakespeare co-hosted the meeting, providing plays every evening.

Of course the Annual Meeting of 1981, held jointly with the ISA World Conference at Stratford-upon-Avon on the theme of "Shakespeare: Man of the Theatre," featured an entire week of performances. The President of the ISA, Sir John Gielgud, starred in "*William the Conqueror, A Shakespearean Entertainment*," a show especially prepared for the occasion, while the Royal Shakespeare Company offered plays every day. Several of their actors directed workshops, and the scholarly sessions reflected the event's focus on performance. A surprise appearance, at least for the organizers, came from Sam Wanamaker, who showed up with no warning to erect a display for the Globe building campaign in the headquarters hotel lobby and solicit support from the delegates. He never bothered to pay the Congress registration fee. He certainly was never listed in the program nor did he ever get a program because the actual attendance so far exceeded the estimates that we resorted to xerox copies, making the originals among the rarest of SAA or ISA documents. Even I do not own one.

The rationality and rigorous nature of the present program-planning process contrasts sharply with earlier practices. From the beginning of my tenure as Executive Secretary, we had at least one session reserved for the best papers offered by any member and chosen in blind readings, an openness that reflected Leeds Barroll's inclusion of young scholars yet to be recognized. Aside from these submissions, however, the earliest programs emerged in only the loosest way. A few Trustees met with me in early fall, threw out names or general ideas, but left it to me to make calls and put together the schedule of speakers and seminar leaders. With that kind of latitude, I often asked women members to contribute, recognizing the then-existing gender imbalance in the SAA leadership. The original set of Trustees included Dolora Cunningham and Mary Hyde, and Madeleine Doran was elected as the second President in 1974, but no other woman headed the organization until Jeanne Roberts' election in 1986. Eventually I got Trustees to arrive a day early for meetings on policy matters and then to plan the next program on Saturday morning at an early breakfast, thus providing a full year for creating the meeting.

The twice-yearly Bulletin first appeared in 1978, improving communication with the members, and a Directory of members came soon after. Another big improvement in continuity came with the By-Laws change to elect a Vice-President, who would subsequently become President and then remain as a Trustee in the third year of his/her term. In that way, the President did not come in ignorant of SAA governance. Perhaps the most profound improvement in running the organization came from my successor, Nancy Elizabeth Hodge. With both an M.B.A. and a Ph.D., together with experience as my Administrative Assistant, she recognized the limitations of managing the SAA on a voluntary, non-compensated basis. During her tenure, increases in both dues and membership numbers and institutional support from Southern Methodist University resulted in a financial restructuring. The change of her position's title from Executive Secretary to Executive Director also contributed to a more professional direction for the organization.

By way of conclusion, I want to share some silly, some unexpected, and some inspiring memories of the twelve years I served as Executive Secretary. I will never forget Norman Rabkin's courage during his Presidency, refusing to compromise with the limitations of the wheelchair to which a botched medical procedure had permanently confined him. I remember Patrick Stewart's amazement at the New Orleans Fairmont Hotel's Easter display of a decidedly Playboy bunny and his delight when she presented him with two giant chocolate eggs to carry home to his children. After pulling me out of an important meeting to take "an extremely urgent call" at the Washington Congress, a woman on the other end of the line asked, "Will I have time to go to the bathroom before the bus leaves for Georgetown?" Misjudging the weather entirely, I arrived in Toronto to negotiate with hotels about rates and meeting spaces wearing white linen and without a coat. That chilly experience sharply contrasts with magic of pear trees blooming in the mountain valley outside Ashland. Watching friendships and careers blossom over time has been a joy, especially with people like Roger and Marian Pringle, who were just dating when we met in 1976, not realizing that he would become the Director of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust and the rock-solid Secretary of the ISA. Besides the remarkable Bruce Tucker and the sophisticated Nancy Hodge, I value the essential contributions of Libby Oakes and Rosemary Allen, my other two Administrative Assistants while I directed the SAA from Vanderbilt with the help of a meagerly paid graduate student. Above all, I cherish the members. Many whom I came to know and love are gone now, but each year among the new faces, I see so many longtime friends to hug, to engage in conversation, to admire. They continue to make the SAA a personal as well as a professional delight.