



FSA

A TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY HISTORY

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On July 16, 1988, something ended in Chicago and virtually every one of its three million residents likely took note. That day, a strong afternoon shower ended an extraordinary stretch of nearly a month without rain in the midwestern city on the shores of Lake Michigan. Something also started on that same date in Chicago, and it is equally likely that almost none of its citizens knew or took note. In a meeting at the Chicago Historical Society, a group convened by the American Association for State and Local History as the Field Services Task Force agreed that it should meet again at the AASLH Annual Meeting in Rochester, New York to continue discussions of mutual interests and concerns. Born of that decision was a collaboration among a small group of public historians that remained active twenty years later as the Field Services Alliance.

The initial meeting of the Field Services Task Force came at a time when AASLH executive director Larry Tise hoped to position the Association as a central resource for those who pursued American history at all levels from university professors to local historians. At a previous AASLH Annual Meeting, he had even unveiled a symbolic version of an archaic mapping device known as a Mercator that showed the desired position for the Association in the middle of the world related to the study of American history. Bringing together field services representatives who had direct contact with thousands of local historical organizations fit perfectly within Tise's overall, and ultimately overreaching, goals.

In 1988, the idea of field services was not new nor were the people who worked as field services representatives unknown to each other. In the early twentieth century, the directors of several large midwestern historical societies conducted field work for their institutions. They carried on active communications with their counterparts. Consequently, when a director such as Solon Buck of the Minnesota Historical Society pursued the formation of county historical societies, he was well aware of the groundbreaking work in the 1890s by Reuben Gold Thwaites to establish the State Historical Society of Wisconsin's affiliation program for local historical societies.

By the 1960s and 1970s, more state historical societies, associations, and commissions began to create positions specifically devoted to field services. These institutions shared information and field services representatives made connections at professional meetings. The inimitable Cindy Sherrell-Leo of the Texas Historical Commission became known to field services colleagues in part because of her impressive array of southwestern jewelry but in greater measure through her leadership of the Small Museums Committee of the American Association of Museums. When the Ohio Historical Society began its Local History Office in 1980, Jim Strider turned to Shel Stromquist of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin for advice and information. As Jim Wallace guided the formative years of the local history program at the Kentucky Historical Society, he looked to his neighboring state across the Ohio River to the evolving model in Columbus. Though the pace of their work did not provide time for frequent communication, field representatives such as Loren Horton of the State Historical Society of Iowa, David Nystuen at the Minnesota Historical Society, Dan Holt of the Illinois State

Historical Library, and Tom Krasean from the Indiana Historical Society found it helpful to share information and occasional frustrations as colleagues facing similar challenges.

Field Services Task Force begins

After the initial gathering of the Field Services Task Force in Chicago, the 1988 AASLH Annual Meeting at Rochester provided an appropriate venue for field services representatives to come together again. The Association assigned Patricia Hogan, director of educational services, to coordinate the follow-up meeting. Items for the group to consider included additions and corrections to a list she had created of field services providers; sharing of technical leaflets and publications produced by field services programs; arrangements for field services representatives to distribute AASLH books through a consignment system; possibilities for AASLH to publish technical literature created by field services personnel; plans by AASLH to produce a directory of workshops offered by field services programs; and political advocacy for state and local history.

The Rochester field services meeting took place as scheduled, but its impact was overshadowed by larger issues within the Association. On the recommendation of Larry Tise, the AASLH Council approved a plan to move the Association's headquarters from Nashville to Baltimore. The proposed move created intense uncertainty for the Association's staff and widespread discussions and disagreement among Association members. Participants in the Field Services Task Force and its AASLH staff liaison were caught in the turmoil.

The unsettled future of AASLH heightened the need for the task force to have solid leadership from within its own ranks. In 1988, its members selected Loren Horton to be the Field Services Task Force chair. As field services representative for the State Historical Society of Iowa, a former member of the AASLH Council, and program chair of the 1978 Annual Meeting, he brought impeccable credentials to the position. He understood as well as anyone the nature and needs of small historical societies, and he led meetings with a calm, but wry style that put everyone at ease.

As observed by J.D. Britton, head of the Ohio Historical Society's Local History Office and a stalwart throughout the history of the Field Services Alliance, the group's path always depended on the person serving as chair. Loren Horton structured the task force meetings to emphasize the sharing of information between colleagues. Representatives from each field services program present gave short reports on the structure of their programs and activities of the past year. He encouraged colleagues who could not attend to submit written reports and invited everyone to bring examples of workshop brochures, newsletters, and technical materials they published. He also conducted meetings with room for light-hearted exchanges about the foibles of both field services workers and their constituents.

Loren Horton viewed information exchange as one element of a three-pronged approach to the task force meetings. He also arranged more in-depth presentations from three or four task force members about an area of specialization within their programs. To the informational and instructional components of the meetings, he added a social element by making restaurant

reservations for members of the group to enjoy each other's company over dinner. In so doing, he established a tradition that remained a highlight of the FSA meetings twenty years later.

AASLH chose Chicago for the initial meeting of the Field Services Task Force in part because of the concentration of field services programs among the large state historical societies of the Midwest. Illinois also had strong field services programs operated respectively by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and the Illinois Heritage Association. Despite the upheaval at the Rochester AASLH Annual Meeting, that city proved to be a good location for the follow-up meeting of the task force because of the presence of active regional historical associations in New York. The New York State Council for the Arts funded staffing that allowed the four associations to provide field services. In Rochester, Jacqueline Day of the Regional Council of Historical Agencies and Hans Finke of the Western New York Association of Historical Agencies both attended the task force meeting.

Loren Horton served a three-year term as chair of the Field Services Task Force, and Deborah Kmetz, local history specialist at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, succeeded him for a three-year term in 1992. Word of the task force spread informally among people who attended AASLH annual meetings, and the original members and new recruits grew into a group that embraced participation from organizations and individuals with varying profiles. In addition to people from institutions with programs devoted solely to field services, individuals such as Jo Ann Williford of the North Carolina Office of Archives & History and Alice Knierim of the Alabama Department of Archives & History enthusiastically joined the task force although their jobs included many responsibilities besides field services. John Schleicher of the Nebraska State Historical Society also fit this profile even as his institution moved toward establishing a fulltime field services position. From the Oklahoma Historical Society, Cherie Cook represented an organization that had just launched fulltime field services through a grant secured jointly with the Oklahoma Museum Association. In 1989 at Seattle, the Field Services Task Force reached a milestone as representation stretched from coast to coast with the active participation of Ron Brentano who directed the field services program of the Oregon Historical Society.

Precedents for Partnership

Debbie Kmetz came to the chair of the task force with award-winning achievements in providing training for local historical societies, particularly in the area of exhibit planning and preparation. Less well known was her personal experience with a variety of grassroots community organizations. She used this background to enhance the flow of information within and about the task force. She worked to produce a thorough and accurate listing of field services representatives and the "interested colleagues" who attended task force meetings even if they were not engaged in providing field services. She followed and expanded many of the precedents set by Loren Horton for these meetings, making sure to include instructional presentations as a component. As well as arranging the meetings, Debbie produced detailed summaries of the proceedings and distributed them to all members. Her five-page summary of the 1992 meeting in Miami included the understatement, "The report from the Field Services Task Force Meeting is lengthy."

Debbie Kmetz used her community activist skills to promote communication and understanding between the Field Services Task Force and AASLH staff and leadership. At times this proved to be a difficult task. Larry Tise left the Association in 1989. Major plans such as the move to Baltimore never took place and several less dramatic initiatives such as the Field Services Task Force fell into limbo. Although the task force met during the AASLH Annual Meeting in rooms arranged by the AASLH staff, neither the 1988 nor 1989 gathering appeared in the Annual Meeting program printed by the Association. By 1991, the task force meeting secured a line in the program, and Debbie's persistence resulted in a full session description for the 1993 program. Her description gave all annual meeting attendees a succinct statement of the mission of the Field Services Task Force:

The Field Services Task Force addresses issues, challenges and common concerns in the work involved in offering educational services and programs to local historical organizations. Members of the task force work at the statewide, national, regional and local levels. Anyone interested in field services is welcome to attend this meeting.

If the task force occasionally seemed an afterthought—or sometimes not even a thought at all—within AASLH, the Association's larger struggles provided part of the reason. Patricia Gordon Michael became executive director and stepped into an organization facing financial problems and searching to identify its most productive role with limited resources.

Debbie Kmetz's report on the Miami meeting made it clear that financial woes were not restricted to AASLH. Active task force members such as Jean Cutler, executive director of the Pennsylvania Federation of Museums and Historical Organizations, were not able to attend because of budgetary concerns. With her typical impulse to spring into action, Jean sent not only her regrets that she could not attend, but also a survey she had launched with other museum associations about the financial conditions of historical organizations. J.D. Britton and Tricia Valentine from the Ohio Historical Society, Jeff Allen of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania, and David Nystuen were among other field services representatives who could not attend due to financial considerations.

Because of travel cutbacks, only seven of the eighteen people who attended the Field Services Task Force meeting in 1992 were actual field services representatives. The bad news on budgets went far beyond travel. The New York State Council on the Arts slashed its support for regional service agencies leaving groups such as the Regional Council of Historical Agencies in Syracuse without staff. Mary Alice Quigley, a previous task force participant, sent a message that her position directing the 25-year-old field services program of the New Jersey Historical Commission had been eliminated. Her message would not be the last of its type during the two decades of Field Services Alliance history.

AASLH took a variety of actions in the face of its own budget shortfalls. One may have caused some confusion in the name game with the appointment of a Task Force on Regional Services and Partnerships. In a "task force to task force" mission, Alice Knierim, Debbie Kmetz, and Tom McKay of the Office of Local History at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin sat in on the discussion of regional services and partnerships. The regional services task force

sought to deliver services at a time of limited AASLH resources by offering the Association to advertise, market, and provide registration support for workshops and programs provided by partner organizations. The Association also proposed to offer discounts on the purchase of any of its books or technical leaflets used in the programs.

Field Services Task Force members suggested three possible partnerships with AASLH: 1) preparing a joint proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities to support training workshops for local historical organizations; 2) seeking funds to reestablish a re-grant program the Association had administered; and 3) producing board orientation materials created by field services representatives and published by AASLH. Only the latter emerged as an action item. As often proved to be the case when busy field services representatives returned to their regular duties, the board orientation materials became an “inaction” item. In addition, field services representatives suggested at the Task Force on Regional Services and Partnerships meeting that obligations to their home institutions made it difficult to merely put AASLH’s name on existing workshops or programs in their states. The meeting had revealed differing notions of the concept of partnership.

From Task Force to Alliance

Differing notions and important accomplishments both marked the three-year tenure of J.D. Britton, who followed Debbie Kmetz as chair of the Field Services Task Force. J.D. brought to the position the straightforward manner of his Wyoming roots and a willingness to engage in change as exemplified by his intensive work with historical societies in Ohio to create strategic plans. He had begun in the Ohio Historical Society Local History Office as historical agency consultant and eventually moved up to head the program.

Cooperation by some field services representatives with the Task Force on Regional Services and Partnerships produced limited results. Despite the strong interest of some Council members, including Sandra Clark of the Michigan Historical Center, the Field Services Task Force continued to have a low profile in comparison to the standing committees and proposed initiatives of the Association. However, many of the active members in AASLH experienced a shock when executive director Patricia Gordon Michael engineered a reorganization that eliminated most of the Association’s committees with the goal of achieving more effective ways to operate. The goal was not realized through this action.

In 1995, the Association went through another leadership change when Terry Davis became executive director. With many of the Association’s committees no longer in existence, the Field Services Task Force occupied a type of “last man standing” position, and Terry Davis arranged to meet with some of its representatives. The meeting again took place in Chicago, this time in June 1996. David Nystuen, Debbie Kmetz, Tom McKay, John Harris of the Indiana Historical Society, Michelle Crow-Dolby of the Ohio Historical Society, and Sandra Clark attended the meeting convened by J.D. Britton and Terry Davis.

Prior to the meeting, Terry Davis had written to all members of the task force and she noted:

I understand from conversations with the Field Services Task Force and AASLH staff and Council that there has never been a very formal relationship between the two groups, even though the Task Force is literally a task force of AASLH. I believe we should work together to develop a set of goals for the Task Force which incorporates it squarely into the long-range planning process and, indeed, into the program plans of AASLH.

This provided a context for the discussions in Chicago.

Whatever the impediments that had prevented previous AASLH proposals from taking hold with field services representatives, the task force had not been standing still. The task force meeting took place each year and experienced a rebound in attendance from Miami as financial conditions improved for state organizations with field services programs. Tom McKay eventually picked up a pen and began drafting the board orientation materials he had proposed in 1992. They took the form of notebook dividers that identified the core functions of a board of directors and applied those responsibilities to five basic activities of historical organizations. In conjunction with a local historical society's specific policies and materials, the dividers could be used to create a board orientation notebook. Task force members reviewed a draft of the orientation organizer and, with special contributions from John Harris and his particular knowledge of non-profit boards, approved its content. AASLH honored its earlier agreement to serve as publisher, and the *Board Orientation Organizer* remained in print in 2008.

As a result of the second Chicago meeting, J.D. Britton led the efforts to create a statement of purpose and goals for the Field Services Task Force. The first recommendation forthcoming from deliberations was to change the name of the group from Field Service Task Force to Field Services Alliance, a representation of a more permanent status than a task force.

Further deliberations produced the first formal statement of purpose for what was now FSA:

The Field Services Alliance exists to create a forum to share information, provide mutual support and collegiality, and promote scholarship among those who, on a statewide or regional level, offer educational services to local historical organizations and others who practice history. The Field Services Alliance shares with the American Association for State and Local History a commitment to support those who preserve and interpret historical resources, and to foster growth and development of historical organizations and personnel on all levels of expertise.

The committee also identified six goals that the full FSA membership modified to five:

1. To maintain and further develop a forum for sharing information and promoting collegiality among the field services professionals and other interested colleagues.
2. To strengthen the Field Services/American Association for State and Local History collaboration.
3. To develop a theory and methodology of practice for field services work.

4. To continue to develop and share materials that help field services professionals do their work.
5. To utilize and encourage others to take advantage of emerging communication technology.

Each goal had several connected activities.

In 1996, a field services initiative that would advance several of the goals had been underway for more than a year. In previous task force meetings, John Harris had stepped forward to champion the cause of promoting electronic communication among field services representatives. During her term as chair, Debbie Kmetz appointed John to head a committee on the subject, and that group suggested a listserve as the first foray of the Field Services Task Force into the electronic world.

Under the guidance and everyday administration of John Harris, FS-LIST became a reality. In his first report to the task force after establishing the listserve, he observed that field services representatives were “not a very chatty bunch,” but the number of postings increased steadily through the years. FS-LIST developed into a valued communication tool for many Field Services Alliance members and set the stage for the creation of an FSA web site as the next step in sharing information electronically.

If the listserve received general acclaim among field services representatives, issues that raised questions about differing notions of both FSA and AASLH attracted as much or more attention. One such difference involved the composition of FSA itself. A limited number of states had historical organizations with field services positions on staff. As a result, the only field services available to small historical societies in some states came through the programs of museum associations. Many field services representatives felt that FSA should seek and embrace museum association staff members as part of the Alliance.

Looking to museum associations as part of the FSA universe offered the potential to expand and diversify membership. J.D. Britton expressed a concern that FSA use caution not to focus too heavily on museums. On several occasions he reminded Alliance meetings of the small historical societies that did not operate museums but needed other types of field services assistance. Members of FSA also realized that museum associations rightfully had responsibilities to art museums, science museums, children’s museums, zoos, and other organizations that were not historical in nature. While these issues prompted differing opinions about expanding FSA membership, gathering during the AASLH Annual Meeting resulted in a de facto composition of the Alliance heavily weighted toward field services representatives who worked in historical organizations.

New Relations with AASLH

Changes to the AASLH bylaws in 1996 created greater differences within the Field Services Alliance. Amendments presented at the Association’s Annual Meeting in Nashville,

altered the procedures for election of the AASLH Council and its officers. The changes gave greater influence to the decisions of the AASLH Nominating Committee and reduced possibilities for contested Council positions decided by a vote of the membership.

The bylaws amendments produced a variety of responses from field services representatives. J.D. Britton had served on the Governance Committee of AASLH that recommended the changes. Some field services representatives regarded the changes as creating a structure similar to ones used by other non-profit organizations. FSA members such as Debbie Kmetz and Tom McKay spoke against the amendments during the AASLH business meeting. Debbie eloquently stated that the amendments would dramatically restrict the power of AASLH members within their own organization. The amendments were approved, but the issue and the discussions surrounding it demonstrated the differing perspectives found within FSA.

As AASLH reestablished its committee structure, field services representatives again assumed positions in which they had traditionally assisted the Association. As in the past, several FSA members played roles as state chairpersons for the Membership Committee and the Awards Committee. Program committees for the AASLH Annual Meeting also frequently included FSA members.

AASLH had established a productive publishing partnership with Alta Mira Press, and Debbie Kmetz accepted a post on the Publications Committee, eventually to be joined by J.D. Britton. Debbie served on the Editorial Advisory Board that reviewed manuscripts for new publications in the State and Local History Book series. She joined with other board members in the time-consuming evaluation of proposals for new titles.

One prospective series of books did not emerge from the Alta Mira partnership. As early as 1992, the Field Services Task Force and AASLH leaders such as Sandra Clark had discussed a series of basic manuals for local historical societies on topics such as collection care, exhibits, interpretation, programming, and management. Mitch Allen, the publisher for Alta Mira Press, saw the manuals as a perfect fit for AASLH, and field services representatives understood the need for written material to help local historical societies to improve their operations. AASLH perceived a relatively large market for the books and a chance to connect with small organizations that had limited knowledge of the Association.

Despite all of the positive potential for a set of basic instructional books, the series remained an unrealized idea. Technical discussions about identifying a series editor, creating a unified format and design, and marketing the publications through field services offices pushed excitement about the content of the manuals into the background. Eventually, the idea lost its momentum.

The unfulfilled promise of the manuals mirrored the results of the call from Terry Davis to incorporate field services “squarely into the long-range planning process” for AASLH. With Terry as the leader of the Association, FSA did establish a more productive relationship with AASLH, but it fell far short of occupying an integral place within overall plans.

Nuts and Bolts of Organization

Against the backdrop of new relationships to navigate, FSA chose an old hand as its leader. The Alliance selected David Nystuen as its chair for 1998 and 1999. David had the longest tenure in field services of any of the FSA members, and he had attended the first meeting in Chicago in 1988. When the group selected Loren Horton as its first chair, he commented that he felt like he had been chosen as “King of Field Services.” Following that remark, David noted his own seniority in the field and jokingly wondered if that made him “God of Field Services.”

While field services colleagues never elevated David Nystuen to a deity, his election as FSA chair demonstrated the deep respect and affection he had earned. FSA members knew of his approaching retirement from the Minnesota Historical Society and hoped to honor him with the position of chair. Understanding that the responsibilities were more than merely honorary, he agreed to take the position for only a two-year term. Election of the chair had operated on an informal basis with nominations from the floor of the FSA meeting and no specific term prescribed in writing. The members agreed to the two-year term, and a precedent had been set that would be made permanent for succeeding FSA chairs.

With a career full of practical experience, David Nystuen brought the Field Services Alliance back to some of the nuts and bolts of field work. He reconfigured the FSA meetings to emphasize the reports from field services offices about their programs and activities. The FSA meetings included time for John Harris to describe the rudimentary web site that had been launched and the additions of the past year. At the FSA gathering during the Sacramento AASLH Annual Meeting, David spiced up the agenda with a session in which members explained the three most unusual problems that they had helped resolve while assisting local historical societies. The reports and exchanges reminded FSA members of the collegial bonds that had held them together for ten years.

AASLH continued to arrange a room for the FSA meeting, but the session had again disappeared from the printed annual meeting program. As AASLH moved aggressively and successfully to stop and reverse a pattern of budget deficits, much of the attention of the Association necessarily turned to financial matters. While the AASLH staff remained receptive to FSA, the group became something of an orphan.

As chair, David also felt the limitations of a group that met only once a year for a single afternoon. Others in FSA also held this opinion, and the Alliance was about to experience a major change as David’s term came to a close in 1999. FSA decided to hold a winter retreat and accepted the invitation from incoming chair Karla Nicholson to meet at the Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill in Kentucky.

Karla Nicholson directed the Community Services Office of the Kentucky Historical Society. Earlier in her career, she had been a constituent receiving services from John Harris and the Local History Services Department in Indiana. She brought useful perspectives from both sides of the field services relationship. Of even greater significance, she carried with her a deep belief in the importance of history and observed more than once that the value of history to

society meant that it could not always take a back seat to social services needs when decisions were made about government funding.

Karla's organizational skill showed in her clear and thorough agendas for FSA meetings and retreats. She revitalized efforts on behalf of the five goals identified in 1996 by appointing committees to work on activities related to each goal. The 2000 FSA meeting in New Orleans and the 2001 winter retreat hosted by Pat Miller of the Illinois Heritage Association and Mary Turner of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency each included reports from the five goal committees. The Goal III committee, which was devoted to developing field services methodology, presented lists of the "Top Ten Characteristics of Highly Effective Field Services Programs" and "Top Ten Characteristics of Highly Effective Field Services Personnel." FSA voted to adopt the lists during the 2001 retreat at Pere Marquette State Park near Grafton, Illinois. The lists became part of the FSA web site.

Further Professionalization

The leadership of each FSA chair guided the path of the group but did not determine all the steps along the way. Typically, projects undertaken by FSA began as an idea brought to the table by a member. The FSA meetings served as a committee of the whole. A project moved forward if a vote or general agreement among the group indicated strong support. In most instances, the FSA chair asked the originator of the idea to lead its development with help from other FSA members as necessary. Projects such as the *Board Orientation Organizer*, FS-LIST, and the FSA web site followed this somewhat informal process.

Karla Nicholson's style of leadership gave more structure to the way in which ideas of the FSA membership would progress to finished projects. She emphasized the work of the committees assigned to each of the FSA goals. Ideas such as the top ten lists emerged in committee, came to the FSA meeting in the committee reports, and were sent back to the committee if necessary for completion.

At the 2000 meeting of FSA, the members voted to make the winter retreat a annual event, but even with two gatherings per year, progress on projects often moved slowly. Some well-received ideas that emerged from the discussions of the goal committees appointed by Karla for the 2000 retreat remained uncompleted as she finished her term. The committee that drafted the top ten lists conceived of them as part of a larger manual of best practices to help field services professionals perform their duties to high standards. As committee members returned home to demanding jobs, the manual languished.

In 2000, the Goal I committee to develop the Alliance as a forum for shared information and collegiality began to consider a set of standing rules for the operation of FSA. The rules would create a written structure for the number of officers, election procedures, and other protocols. FSA began operating under the new rules in 2001, but the group did not adopt the rules by an actual vote until the 2002 winter retreat in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The order of implementation followed by approval was not a best practice that field services representatives would have recommended to their constituents.

In 2001, AASLH scheduled its annual meeting for Indianapolis, Indiana. On the morning of September 11th at 7:00 a.m., David Grabitske, Grants/Field Services Assistant at the Minnesota Historical Society, boarded a flight for Indianapolis to attend his first FSA meeting. When his plane landed, a flight attendant made an unexplained announcement that all passengers, including those with connecting flights, would have to deplane and claim their checked baggage because of the “national emergency.” Cellphone messages and images on concourse televisions soon provided the explanation. The terrorist attacks and tragic results in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania left the nation in shock and air travel shut down. AASLH cancelled its annual meeting.

Without meeting in Indianapolis, FSA assembled again in February 2002. Robbie Davis, field services coordinator at the South Carolina State Museum, had attended the previous year’s retreat and invited the group to Myrtle Beach. The 2002 retreat became an event remembered among FSA members as an exceptionally fruitful gathering. With new leadership from chair Andy Verhoff, historical agency consultant at the Ohio Historical Society, the group was able to pick up the goal committee work and recapture the momentum started in Karla Nicholson’s term.

Andy arranged an agenda that gained an introspective tone as field services representatives took a thoughtful look at how they conducted their work. The mood of the meeting may also have reflected the relief of being together again as friends after the horrible events five months earlier. David Grabitske, finally attending his first FSA meeting, was impressed by the professionalism of colleagues discussing such issues as walking the fine line between the needs of a field services representative’s own institution and those of the organizations assisted through field services offices.

Andy Verhoff brought confident energy to his leadership of FSA. He had an ability to delegate work, coupled with an understanding of the need to follow up on projects already underway. He also proved to be one of the best record keepers among the FSA chairs.

Andy worked to raise the profile of FSA within AASLH by securing again a full session description of the FSA meeting in the program printed for the AASLH Annual Meeting. He also took the lead in organizing sessions about field services for the main portion of the annual meeting as predecessors such as Loren Horton, Debbie Kmetz, and Karla Nicholson had done. In 2002, he chaired a session about “Partnerships Promoting Professionalism: Collaborating to Provide Field Services to Local Historical Organizations.” The following year, he organized “Working for You: State Field Services in a New World.”

The focus of FSA meetings and retreats on the work of the goal committees created exceptional continuity between the tenures of Karla and Andy. The carryover of participation by key members on the committees also contributed to the continuity. John Harris remained steadfast in his work on the FSA web site which received a boost from a new logo and expanded features in February 2002. Tim Glines, manager of outreach services for the Minnesota Historical Society, accepted appointments to multiple goal committees on which he served over the course of several meetings. FSA had achieved a type of institutional stability that contrasted to the ad hoc operation of its early years.

Reflecting Difficult Times

Some of the FSA members looked back fondly at its early informality. At times its meetings still took on the feel of a small club with the trading of good-natured barbs between J.D. Britton and John Harris or the exchange of sharp opinions by Karla Nicholson and Tom McKay. However, FSA welcomed and encouraged members from diverse institutions that provided or supported field services. People such as Melissa Davis from Humanities Tennessee, Carol Harsh of the Smithsonian Institution's Museum on Main Street program, and Jeff Larrabee representing the Historical Services Division of the Army National Guard became regular attendees and active participants. As in the case of Andy Verhoff, FSA incorporated its new members into leadership positions.

While the structure of FSA moved toward stability, too many of its members were caught up in a period of financial turmoil that produced a torrent of bad news. In 2001, the Oregon Historical Society eliminated its field services position, and Rick Read, who had become an active FSA participant, left the society. A year later, John Schleicher of the Nebraska State Historical Society emailed on FS-LIST that his position and the fulltime field services program he had built up were being eliminated. In Wisconsin, the state historical society abolished the position Debbie Kmetz held as local history specialist. The Kansas Historical Society reversed its 2000 decision to establish a field services position. On a less traumatic scale, travel and printing funds were reduced in Minnesota and Indiana, respectively.

FSA agendas reflected the difficult times. At the 2002 FSA meeting in Portland, Andy Verhoff scheduled a session titled "Field Services—An Endangered Species?" In a fitting irony, the meeting ran out of time and the session was reduced to a discussion on FS-LIST. It was little wonder that the 2003 winter retreat in Columbus included a session on "Charging for Field Services: Pros and Cons."

Connie Rendfeld, associate director of the Local History Services Department at the Indiana Historical Society, succeeded Andy Verhoff as FSA chair. Connie had transferred into the local history department from another position, and her selection as chair followed the precedent set by Andy of a relatively new FSA member taking the position. Her open manner and calm presence made her meetings feel like she had been part of FSA from the beginning. The organizational skills she commanded from her library and archives background served well in a group where the chair's duties made it very much a hands-on position.

Connie's selection kept FSA in good hands, but it resulted from another blow to field services programs. Under the relatively new FSA standing rules, Robbie Davis, field services coordinator at the South Carolina State Museum, had been chosen as vice chair. By adding a vice chair, FSA had created a presumed successor for the position of chair. However, during a time of budget cuts in South Carolina, Robbie took a position with the Smithsonian Institution's Museum on Main Street program. His South Carolina field services position was not filled. Moving into a new job, Robbie resigned as FSA vice chair. Fortunately, Connie filled the void that developed within FSA's leadership.

Connie Rendfeld proved to be adept at using a low-key manner to move FSA meetings through jammed packed agendas. The 2004 winter retreat hosted by AASLH in Nashville included an update on FSA status with a discussion of its mission statement, a review of successes and shortcomings related to the five established goals, lengthy reports from AASLH and the Coalition for Small Museums, and a wrap-up session about current problems and trends in conducting field work. The FSA meeting that followed in St. Louis featured the reports from the goal committees and AASLH and added demonstrations from FSA members of exercises and materials used in training workshops on the topics of exhibits, interpretation, and board development. All of this happened in one afternoon.

In 2004, the FSA web site added a new page giving an overview of the organization. The page provided succinct descriptions of FSA's clients, membership, programs, structure, and vision. The section on clients stated that the majority represented historical societies, but noted that a long list of cultural organizations such as art museums, zoos, and libraries also needed the types of field services provided by FSA members. The vision statement proposed a field services office in every state by the year 2010.

Building Strong Relationships

During Connie's term, the waxing and waning relationship between FSA and AASLH reached new levels of cooperation. Since 1988, the Association had arranged the FSA meeting room during the AASLH Annual Meeting. In 2002, AASLH made its server available as host for the FSA web site. The *Board Orientation Organizer* had been a project of mutual benefit to FSA and AASLH. In 2004, another such project grew out of the closer ties and ongoing discussions between the two organizations. The Association made space available in *History News Dispatch* for a column titled "Ask FSA." In each installment, a field services representative or an expert recruited by an FSA member answered a question, large or small, faced by local historical organizations. Pat Miller authored the first "Ask FSA" column on the topic of "Matchbook Storage."

Several factors contributed to the strengthening ties between FSA and AASLH. Under the leadership of Terry Davis, the Association had continued to solidify its financial position and achieved a staffing level that allowed more time for interaction with FSA. Karla Nicholson moved from her position at the Kentucky Historical Society to a job with AASLH. She took along her direct knowledge of and passion for field services.

In addition to staff moves, AASLH was beginning to explore a series of initiatives of direct interest to FSA members and their clients. The Association revived the idea of publishing a series of basic instructional books for small historical societies. AASLH also began consideration of an incremental standards program to help historical societies evaluate and improve their operations. FSA members had discussed this concept several times over the years. Finally, AASLH joined in a coalition of organizations hoping to advocate for Federal formula grants that would benefit history.

FSA sought to build on a strengthening relationship by expanding its presence on the AASLH Annual Meeting program. Carol Harsh took the lead in this endeavor. She served on

the AASLH program committee and proposed several sessions from FSA members. In 2004 and 2005, she organized sessions about shared concerns of small museums, creative solutions for small museum problems, planning and preparing exhibitions, and governance.

FSA elected Pat Miller to succeed Connie Rendfeld as chair. Pat's roots in the organization reached all the way back to the first Field Services Task Force meeting in Chicago in 1988. She had been a member of the AASLH Council and had served both AASLH and the American Association of Museums in numerous capacities. As executive director of the Illinois Heritage Association, she understood as well as anyone the challenges of keeping a small nonprofit organization operating and healthy.

Pat Miller began her work as chair with a concern about the attendance at FSA meetings and retreats. The excellent 2005 winter retreat hosted by the Minnesota Historical Society attracted seventeen participants. Despite the prospect of winter in Minnesota, this number actually exceeded the attendees at previous retreats in Nashville, Columbus, and Myrtle Beach. Nonetheless, Pat felt the health of FSA depended on attracting more participants.

Through personal phone calls and emails, Pat spread the word about FSA meetings. She targeted state museum associations because of the concerns they shared with field services programs. Results showed immediately. Twenty-three people attended the 2006 winter retreat in New Harmony, Indiana. At the FSA meeting during the AASLH Annual Meeting in Phoenix, thirty participants took part.

The FSA agendas continued to reflect close connections with AASLH. The Association had hired Cherie Cook to guide the incremental standards initiative. Her FSA connection began through her position with the Oklahoma Historical Society at the inception of the Field Services Task Force.

Two issues emerged during Pat Miller's term. The first was a relatively minor concern that time spent during meetings on AASLH matters cut into the time remaining to conduct FSA business. A second and greater issue involved the way in which FSA structured its business. The Alliance continued to work through committees assigned to goals that had been identified in 1996. The activities and projects of the goal committees changed through the years, but some in FSA felt the implementation of a new committee structure was overdue.

To reorganize and streamline its operation, FSA approved a new set of standing committees at its 2006 winter retreat in New Harmony, Indiana. The action established an executive committee and additional standing committees for retreat and meeting programs, professional practices, membership, communications, and advocacy. The agendas for FSA meetings and retreats took on a new look for the first time in almost ten years.

The New Harmony retreat, encapsulated many of the strengths of FSA. The beautiful setting promoted the kind of relaxed collegiality that was a hallmark of the organization. FSA members demonstrated their depth of professional commitment by adopting a code of ethics for field services representatives. Pat Miller crafted an agenda that explored new ideas. She brought materials about the successful digitization workshops the Illinois Heritage Association had

presented. John Harris led an interactive session introducing the FAT (Factors, Actions, and Techniques) method of analysis that could be used to assist in the formation or dissolution of a nonprofit organization.

Toward Better Collegiality

FSA built a strong connection to the AASLH staff, but the relationship of field services to the Association's elected leadership over nearly two decades had too often been unproductive or even destructive. On separate occasions in Iowa and Indiana, the job descriptions of Loren Horton and Connie Rendfeld had been rewritten so drastically that it crippled their opportunities to provide field services. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin eliminated the job held by Debbie Kmetz and refused to accept private funds from the Wisconsin Council for Local History that could have been used to extend her position for an additional year. Each of these field services professionals had served as FSA chair, and in each instance, the decisions about their positions were made by agency directors who had served as or would become officers on the AASLH Council. This group of leaders did not value same traits and talents that FSA members had admired in three of their chairs.

Several FSA meetings had addressed potential tensions between field services representatives and the institutions for which they worked. As the year 2010 approached with little if any progress toward the FSA vision of a field services office in every state, these tensions merited examination. Often the leaders of statewide organizations, and perhaps AASLH as well, viewed small historical societies as customers or consumers. The thousands upon thousands of local historical organizations throughout the country and all of their members presented a tantalizing market for the sale of publications, memberships, and other services or products. Field services professionals most often thought of local historical societies as clients or constituents with a wide array of needs for assistance and very few financial resources to pay for help. FSA members focused on service needs in areas as diverse as collections, programming, exhibits, fund raising, governance, and even such small details as how to store historical matchbooks.

The word "colleague" rarely came into use whether agency heads or field services representatives were speaking about local historical societies. Vast differences prevailed between the training and experience of professional staff members in large historical organizations and volunteers operating small historical societies. A parallel disparity could be found between a heart surgeon and a volunteer EMT. Yet they both became colleagues in the health care system when one saved a heart attack victim's life and the other performed bypass surgery. In the case of local historical societies, they directly served the same mission as state historical organizations by vastly extending the historical record that was being preserved. In this sense, understanding small historical societies first as colleagues and second as either consumers or constituents would have benefited both field services representatives and the institutions for which they worked.

The question of regarding local historical organizations as customers, constituents, or colleagues represented an issue within the broader framework of the methodology and practice of field services. In 1996, FSA had established a goal of advancing that methodology and

practice; but eleven years later, this goal remained largely unrealized. A second goal to develop and share instructional materials may have shown less progress. A proposed FSA manual for field services work could not gain traction. The suggested posting of sample forms such as job descriptions and an annotated bibliography of resources on the FSA web site did not materialize.

Thanks to the determined work of John Harris, the goal of using electronic technology became a reality. While more contributions from others would have expanded content, the web site provided a good overview of FSA's purpose, history, and plans. FS-LIST developed into a communication tool valued by many of the FSA members and their interested colleagues.

The goal of strengthening ties with AASLH traced an up and down course, but by 2008 the relationship was stronger than ever. The reports from AASLH staff became a standard feature of FSA agendas. The number of "Ask FSA" columns stood at seventeen and counting. The Association fully integrated FSA members into projects such as the incremental standards initiative, and both John Harris and J.D. Britton served terms on the AASLH Council in the 2000s.

FSA had identified as its first goal maintaining and developing a forum for sharing information and promoting collegiality among field services professionals and other interested colleagues. For this goal, FSA achieved unabashed success. Over the period of twenty years, FSA meetings and retreats included dozens of presentations by members to their peers about the techniques and challenges of good field services work. An active exchange of ideas, written materials, and war stories occurred at every gathering. Through periods of uncertainty at AASLH, budget problems at home institutions, and two decades of a rapidly changing society, FSA welcomed new members, renewed acquaintanceships, mentored young colleagues, and provided camaraderie over casual dinners.

The Future of FSA

The success of its collegiality helped FSA sustain itself as it turned to a new generation of leaders. David Grabitske was elected as chair. Although David was a veteran of FSA meetings, he represented the group of younger field services professionals needed to sustain the organization into the future. He enjoyed sharing new perspectives on field services challenges while at the same time maintaining a disciplined approach to setting and following procedures. He had been the architect behind establishing the new standing committee structure for FSA.

David Grabitske presided over his first winter retreat in Austin, Texas. Laura Casey of the Texas Historical Commission planned the local arrangements and worked with David on setting the agenda. Her participation reconnected FSA with an institution that was one of the traditional leaders in field services. The same had happened when Jerome Thompson of the State Historical Society of Iowa became active in FSA.

As old connections reformed, David brought forth an altered approach to the winter retreat. He added sessions from experts outside of the FSA family on topics such as insurance for historical societies and conflict resolution within nonprofit organizations. In so doing, he hoped to give the winter retreats the type of professional development opportunities that could

more easily be justified when requesting travel support from home institutions facing tight budgets.

In 2008, FSA ushered in not only a new chair, but also a new decade of service. Unlike the nursery rhyme of old, none of the FSA members were little girls and only a few had curls, but the organization sometimes experienced similar extremes of good and bad performance. For twenty years, it had forged a tremendous sense of collegiality whether facing lean times, differences of opinion, or changing membership. By contrast, whenever enthusiasm boiled up for the creation of basic instructional books for small historical societies, well

Eight years into a new century, old challenges and new opportunities remained ahead. The AASLH Annual Meeting schedule brought the group back to Rochester, New York. The future of FSA rested squarely on the ability of its members to combine the strengths of its traditions with the possibilities of new ideas.

Field Services Chairs

- 1989-1991 – Loren Horton, State Historical Society of Iowa
- 1992-1994 – Deborah Kmetz, State Historical Society of Wisconsin
- 1995-1997 – J.D. Britton, Ohio Historical Society
- 1998-1999 – David Nystuen, Minnesota Historical Society
- 2000-2001 – Karla Nicholson, Kentucky Historical Society
- 2002-2003 – Andy Verhoff, Ohio Historical Society
- 2004-2005 – Connie Rendfeld, Indiana Historical Society
- 2006-2007 – Pat Miller, Illinois Heritage Association
- 2008- – David Grabitske, Minnesota Historical Society

Field Services Annual Meetings

- 1988 – Rochester, New York
- 1989 – Seattle, Washington
- 1990 – Washington, D.C.
- 1991 – Dearborn, Michigan
- 1992 – Miami, Florida
- 1993 – Columbus, Ohio
- 1994 – Omaha, Nebraska
- 1995 – Saratoga Springs, New York
- 1996 – Nashville, Tennessee
- 1997 – Denver, Colorado
- 1998 – Sacramento, California
- 1999 – Baltimore, Maryland
- 2000 – New Orleans, Louisiana
- 2001 – *Indianapolis, Indiana Meeting Cancelled*
- 2002 – Portland, Oregon
- 2003 – Providence, Rhode Island
- 2004 – St. Louis, Missouri
- 2005 – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
- 2006 – Phoenix, Arizona
- 2007 – Atlanta, Georgia
- 2008 – Rochester, New York

Field Services Winter Retreats

- 2000 – Harrodsburg, Kentucky
- 2001 – Grafton, Illinois
- 2002 – Myrtle Beach, South Carolina
- 2003 – Columbus, Ohio
- 2004 – Nashville, Tennessee
- 2005 – Minneapolis, Minnesota
- 2006 – New Harmony, Indiana
- 2007 – Washington, D.C.
- 2008 – Austin, Texas

Note on Sources

The beginning of FSA as a temporary task force with a chair as the only officer resulted in an understandable dearth of written records for its early years. Documents posted on the FSA web site and held in files maintained by the FSA chairs offered progressively more information about successive years. These records included FSA meeting agendas from 1993, 1995, 1997-2000, and 2002-2007; FSA meeting minutes from 1992, 1995, 1997, and 2002-2006; winter retreat agendas from 2000-2008; and winter retreat minutes from 2000-2007. Files after 2000 also included numerous goal committee and standing committee reports. A file on “FSA as an Endangered Species” provided information. Lists of FSA members and interested colleagues existed for 1997 and 2001-2004.

Both Pat Miller and John Harris located an agenda and preliminary list of participants for the 1988 Field Services Task Force Meeting in Chicago. However, several of the seventeen listed participants, including at least one speaker, did not attend. Conversely, others not on the list did participate. An accurate record of the actual attendees for that first meeting may not exist.

Telephone interviews with each of the FSA chairs proved to be essential in writing this history. These chairs were: Loren Horton, Debbie Kmetz, J.D. Britton, David Nystuen, Karla Nicholson, Andy Verhoff, Connie Rendfeld, Pat Miller, and David Grabitske. John Harris offered critical information by phone and email about the FSA web site and several other matters. An email exchange with Carol Harsh explained her work with the AASLH Annual Meeting program on behalf of FSA.

A number of individual documents contributed information. Memos from Patricia Hogan, Debbie Kmetz, and Terry Davis are referenced in the text. A letter to the Wisconsin Historical Society from state legislators Michael Ellis, Robert Jauch, Gwendolynne S. Moore, Eugene Hahn, Dean Kaufert, Gary Sherman, Richard Grobschmidt, Mary Lazich, Robert Wirch, DuWayne Johnsrud, and Marty Reynolds provided background on private money offered to fund the local history specialist position in Wisconsin. David Grabitske produced a list of the “Ask FSA” articles.

History News during the twenty-year span from 1988-2008 contained background information about the relationship between FSA and AASLH including the FSA members who served on the AASLH Council. The printed programs for the AASLH Annual Meeting over that same period were used as a source.