

SHA Class of '82: *Where are they now?*

Class of 1982 at SHA 40th reunion celebration with inflatable class mate Wayne Newton, Colonial Williamsburg, 1999. Far Right: Members of Class of 1982 at AASLH Annual meeting, Nashville, 1996.



Photos: James Vaughan

BY JAMES M. VAUGHAN

Is leadership a skill that can be learned? This year the Developing History Leaders @SHA program (formerly the Seminar for Historical Administration) marks its fifty-second year as the premier leadership development program in the history field. In more than half a century SHA—a partnership program between the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH), the American Association of Museums (AAM), Colonial Williamsburg, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the Indiana Historical Society—has enrolled more than 900 participants who have returned to the field presumably better able to lead their institutions and better able to advance the field as a whole. How can we measure if SHA indeed produces successful leaders and what they contribute to the profession?

Measuring Leadership

We can expect some common characteristics in the careers of leaders. Leadership is largely about managing change and advancing, not just your career, but your institution and the profession. Leaders are team builders who energize and motivate people in a way that makes work rewarding and exciting.

Leaders exhibit career paths of increasing responsibility. Leaders are engaged in professional organizations, serve on boards, and are frequent presenters at meetings. Leaders author articles and books advancing our knowledge and urging improvements in the way we do our business. Leaders are recognized by their peers by election

to office or as recipients of honors or awards. And finally, leaders are eager to share their knowledge as teachers and mentors urging others to develop their leadership skills.

One way to measure the success of SHA is to review the careers of a single class, tally the evidence of leadership, and ask each of them if SHA made a difference in their careers. This year marks the thirtieth anniversary of the SHA class of 1982, and three decades should provide a sufficient record to assess leadership. So I have reached out to my fellow 1982 seminararians to compile the career record of a single class. What follows is not a scientific assessment but a collective résumé and a set of personal reflections about our thirty-years since SHA.



This article is dedicated to:
Harold Dabbs Woodfin, Jr.
(1940–2010)

SHA
Class
of
1982.

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The 1982 Seminar for Historical Administration

We came from Iowa and Oregon, from Arizona and New Hampshire, from Wisconsin and South Carolina, from sixteen states in all. We gathered at Colonial Williamsburg on a sunny Saturday morning in early June 1982. We met for the first time as total strangers, but we had a lot in common. We worked mostly at small institutions, historic house museums, and historic sites. Most of us were in our twenties or early thirties, with only three to five years experience on the job. We were eager, ambitious, and dedicated young professionals and we bonded quickly. We had come to the mother ship of historic sites to learn from the most admired leaders of our profession. On our first day of class, we were told that we were eighteen of the finest young minds in our profession—of course we believed it!

In 1982 the SHA was a four-week, total immersion program. We had one Sunday and one weekend off from the intense schedule of classes and field trips. On these free days we piled into cars and drove off to visit more historic sites and museums on our own. We did almost everything as a group, including our daily morning walk down DoG (Duke of Gloucester) Street from our houses at William and Mary to our classroom in the Public Records Office. We frequently sang or chanted as we walked. We stayed up late each night discussing the day's classes and critiquing the sites we visited. We worked hard and laughed a lot. We

challenged our teachers at every opportunity. We challenged the Colonial Williamsburg interpreters to a cricket match in period costume, a privilege denied to later classes because of our unruly behavior. We traveled by horse-drawn coach to our graduation party and danced on the tables. We were a class with an attitude. For four weeks we had a rich learning experience and a great time. I suspect that some doubted that this class of 1982 would ever contribute a record of leadership to the field. But when we parted on the final Saturday morning we were confident that we would go out and make a difference.



The Class of 1982: Where Are We Now and What Have We Accomplished?

We met as young strangers but many of us are now old friends, who gather at AASLH and AAM meetings and at every opportunity in between. Of the original “eighteen finest minds,” six left the field within a few years. Two others recently retired from leadership positions: Fred Armstrong, who served twenty-two years as the Director of the West Virginia State Archives, and Dabs Woodfin, who retired in 2009 as Director of the Nicholas Newlin Foundation in Glen Mills, Pennsylvania, after twenty-five years of service.

Here is a quick look at the ten members of the SHA Class of 1982 who still continue to serve the field, and their reflections about SHA.

Doug Alves, Director, Calvert (MD) Marine Museum. In 1982, Doug was Director of the Wethersfield Historical Society in Connecticut. Since 1991 he has been leading the Calvert Marine Museum. He has been very active in AAM, AASLH, and the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums where he served several terms as board president. He is a founding member and Trustee of the Maryland Association of Museums and a recipient of AAM's Excellence in Peer Review Service Award.

“SHA gave me the confidence and knowledge to continue in my career choice. I got more practical experience in this short, intensive museum boot camp than in my graduate program!”

Lee Brockington, Director of Interpretation, The Belle W. Baruch Foundation Seminar on Historic Administration. In 1982, Lee was Curator of Education for Historic Columbia Foundation. She has been an engaged member and presenter for the Southeast Museums Conference, the South Carolina Federation of Museums, and several local historical societies. She has authored three books, numerous articles, and received a Career Achievement Award from Columbia College.

“SHA boosted my confidence as a young professional and created an awareness for me of the community of museums. This seminar has such impact due to the tradition and legacy of all participants who have helped create a sense of camaraderie and willingness to help the next seminarian on the way up in their career.”

Nancy Davis, Curator, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. In 1982, Nancy was Assistant Curator at Gunston Hall in Virginia. During her career she has served in leadership positions at the Octagon Museum, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore. She serves on the board of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities and as a Trustee of the 1772 Foundation. She has taught at three universities and published numerous articles and catalogues.

“For me, SHA has always been about the people, both our classmates and the instructors. They inspired me then, and they inspire me now. The occasion to engage with your colleagues and to forthrightly discuss issues related to the management of historic sites is an invaluable experience.”

David Donath, President and CEO, Woodstock Foundation and Director, Billings Farm & Museum, Woodstock, Vermont. In 1982, David was the site director at the Old Wade House Historic Site in Greenbush, Wisconsin. He later served as director at Strawberry Banke, and has been a leader in Vermont since 1985. David served as AASLH board chair from 2008 to 2010 and served for ten years on its Council. He also served on the boards of ALHFAM, Vermont Historical Society, the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and twice chaired the Vermont Advisory Council on Historic Preservation. He now serves on the boards of Fort Ticonderoga and Jackson Hole Preserve. He is a frequent presenter at professional meetings and has published numerous articles.



Group photo Class of 1982.

"I owe a great deal to the perspective and network that I got at SHA. The network of colleagues and friends was key to me and remains extremely rewarding to this day. I tend to organize the years as 'before SHA' and 'after SHA.' It was that profound a turning point."

Bettie Kerr, Historic Preservation Officer and Director of Historic Preservation for the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, Lexington, Kentucky. In 1982, Bettie was Historic Resource Administrator for the Lexington-Fayette County Historic Commission. Today Bettie leads the preservation community in central Kentucky and has served on many local boards including the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation. She has frequently presented at professional conferences including AASLH and the National Trust. She authored a book on Lexington history and has been recognized by several organizations for her leadership in preservation.

"Participating in SHA was such an important part of my professional life and also positively impacted my life in general. The network of connections that evolved

through SHA, and seeing those people at professional conferences, emailing, talking on the phone, has truly provided me with very interesting and helpful discussions and insights on a broader level over the years."

Andy Masich, President and CEO, Senator John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 1982, Andy was Director, Arizona Historical Society Museum in Yuma. He later served as Vice President of the Colorado Historical Society in Denver. He has lead the Heinz History Center since 1998 and today serves as the Chairman of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Andy has served on the AAM Accreditation Commission for eight, the AASLH Council for four, and the SHA faculty for seven years. He has authored four

books and won two Emmy Awards for documentaries. He serves as a peer reviewer for AAM, IMLS, and NEH.

"The SHA was by far the most important professional training of my career, not only in terms of leadership lessons learned, useful resources revealed, and museum mysteries demystified, but in terms of professional network building. The collegial atmosphere of the seminar encouraged lifelong friendships among the faculty and participants. In the months immediately following the seminar, I frequently turned to my notes and resource materials, but as time passed I came to realize that the more important and lasting benefits came from the knowledge and reassurance offered unselfishly by trusted SHA colleagues only a phone call away."

Mark Peterson, Executive Director, Winona County Historical Society, Winona, Wisconsin. In 1982, Mark was Museum Director for the Aurora Colony Historical Society in Aurora, Oregon. Since 1983 he has been a leader in the Minnesota museum community. He has served on the Minnesota Sesquicentennial Commission and the boards

of the Minnesota Humanities Center, Minnesota Association of Museums, the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota, and the State Historical Records Advisory Board. Mark chairs the State Resources Advisory Board and is a past President of the Southern Minnesota Historical Assembly. He has also taught at Winona State University.

"SHA was a life changing experience for me. I was in my first museum job at the time and used the month at SHA to reflect on what I liked about my current job and what I didn't. I realized I wanted something more. It motivated me to finish my thesis and start looking for something more challenging."

Janet Vaughan, Senior Director, Member Services, American Association of Museums, Washington, D.C. In 1982, Janet was director of the Wornall House in Kansas City, Missouri. She later served as the director of Jackson County (MO) and Johnson County (KS) historical societies. She has served on the AASLH Council and as a peer reviewer for IMLS and NEH. Janet authored a book on the Kansas City Monarchs Negro League baseball team and served as Vice President of the Board of the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City. Janet has also served on the boards of the Kansas State Historical Society, the Missouri Humanities Council, and the Missouri Museum Association. In 2010 she was awarded the distinguished Alumni Award from her college at UMKC. Her work has also been recognized with awards from AASLH, AIA, and AAUW.

"SHA was life changing in so many ways. At the end of the four weeks, I left feeling connected to the larger profession. I understood my museum's issues and concerns in a larger context. I had the opportunity at a very early stage in my career to interact with leaders in the profession and was challenged by them to assume my own leadership role. I developed a network of colleagues and friends who have been with me through the years and across the miles."

Adah Leah Wolf, Main Street Manager, City of Farmersville, Texas. In 1982, Adah Leah was Curator of Education at Arizona State Museum in Tucson. She later worked for the Texas Historical Commission, the Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas, and as an independent consultant. She has served as President of the Northeast Texas Museum Association. In 2003 she shifted to historic preservation and the Main Street program. Today, she has come full circle, as her Main Street program is shepherding the planning for a new downtown history museum!



Nine members of the Class of 1982 at an AASLH



In the classroom at the Public Records Office.



In period costume for our graduation party.



conference in the 1980s.

"SHA was a wonderful experience at a formative time in my career. Being surrounded by the best of the best in the profession was very inspirational. That training laid the groundwork for my administrative skills. I would bet that I use some of the skills that I learned way back then EVERY WORKING DAY!"

Jim Vaughan, Executive Director, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

In 1982, I was Director of Strawberry Banke in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. I later served as director of the Hagley Museum, the San Diego Historical

Society, and the Hermitage in Nashville, Tennessee. In January 2011 I retired as Vice President for Historic Sites of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, but in November accepted Andy Masich's offer to return to work in Pennsylvania. I served on the AASLH Council for eight years (including four as treasurer) and as a peer reviewer for IMLS, NEH, MAP, and accreditation for three decades. I convened and hosted two invitational conferences on historic site issues at Kykuit in 2002 and 2007. I received the AAM Superior Volunteer Service Award and in 2006 was named to the AAM Centennial Honor Roll.

My comments about SHA are similar to my classmates. SHA was the most important single event in shaping my career. It greatly expanded my horizons as I discovered that my community of professional peers and my responsibilities extended far beyond the staff at my museum. Working with my fellow seminarians I learned about shared leadership, teamwork, consensus building, and putting joy and energy into our work. More important than the content, the SHA experience altered my attitude with which I approached my work. SHA also changed my life in many unexpected ways. Today my dearest friends are my SHA classmates. Over the years I have hired one, was hired by another, and married a third!

Scoring the SHA Class of 1982

How does the Class of 1982 measure up against the expected characteristics of leaders we listed earlier?

- Each career shows the upward path expected from leaders.
- Each class member extended his or her leadership beyond their own institutions to serve the profession.
- All have served as peer reviewers for national, state, and local organizations, most notably AAM, NEH, and IMLS.
- The degree of engagement in professional organizations is

remarkable. Four class members have provided twenty-eight years of service on the AASLH Council, including ten years as officers. All have served on the boards of local, regional, and/or state organizations.

- All have been recognized by their peers by election to leadership positions and/or as recipients of awards for excellent work and distinguished service.
- All have advanced our knowledge and our field through frequent presentations at professional meetings and published articles in *History News*, *Museum*, and dozens of professional journals. The Class of 1982 has authored nine books and more than a dozen exhibit catalogues.
- All have been eager to serve as mentors and teachers for those who follow by teaching at universities, presenting at meetings, and continually urging staff and other young professionals to apply to SHA.
- All share the attitude that our work is important, challenging, and fun.

The record of the SHA Class of 1982 convinces me that SHA does indeed produce leaders for the field. You can judge the evidence of leadership for yourself. You can also see from the quotes above that my classmates and I all consider the SHA experience to be the most critical event in shaping our careers.

It has been my privilege to serve on the SHA faculty for more than a decade. I see the same transformations in attitudes and broadening of horizons in each SHA class. I have no doubt that SHA continues to shape careers and to build leadership for the future. Each of the members of the Class of 1982 has encouraged young and mid-career professionals to participate in SHA because we know that strong and able leadership for the

field is a continuing challenge. We are also personally aware of what a life-enriching experience it can be.

I leave the closing comment about the SHA Class of 1982 to Bettie Kerr.

"Mostly we shared a camaraderie that was reflected throughout our time at SHA, and has continued to this day. We have kept up with each other through all this time, picking up where we last left off, sharing stories, concerns, sometimes family issues, and always, always a sense of humor. All this while genuinely believing that the field we chose was, and continues to be, rewarding, frustrating, challenging, and, above all, worthwhile." ●

Jim Vaughan is Executive Director, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. He can be reached at jvaughan@pa.gov.



The SHA, Class of 1982 on their way to class singing and dancing their way down the Duke of Gloucester Street in Colonial Williamsburg.



Class of 1982 at rest.