Seventy Years of the Society of Architectural Historians

During the summer of 1940, a group of architects, archaeologists, architectural historians, and graduate students (among them G. Holmes Perkins, Kenneth Conant, George M. A. Hanfman and Turpin C. Bannister) gathered regularly at the Harvard Faculty Club for dinners, lectures, and conversation and to plan “inspection trips” to New England architecture. On 31 July that year, twenty-five of them, after a particularly spirited meeting (the minutes note hecklers in the audience urging Professor Herbert Bloch, lecturing on Roman bricks, to demonstrate his “famous tasting method for dating” bricks—which he declined) founded the American Society of Architectural Historians. (The word “American” was dropped in 1947 when the Society was officially incorporated.) Their goal was “to foster the understanding and appreciation of architectural history among both professional scholars and laymen” and the publication of an “unpretentious journal.” Perhaps they imagined something like the eighteenth-century Society of Dilettanti—young British enthusiasts who shared their knowledge and passion about the art and architecture of antiquity over dinner and wine in each other’s company and made occasional excursions.

Little could anyone in this assembly imagine that what was founded in Cambridge on the eve of World War II would grow into a global society with 3,500 members, the publisher of the most respected journal in the field, the organizer of large annual meetings, and today recognized by its peers as a pioneer in digital scholarship and research.

In its seventieth year, the Society of Architectural Historians—rather than dwelling on its past accomplishments—is happily occupied with looking forward and planning ahead. Probably never in its long history has it engaged to a similar degree in new initiatives, explored new methods of scholarly communication, and anticipated future challenges and developments. Thanks to generous funding from the Mellon Foundation over the last three years, the SAH launched its Architecture Resources Archive (SAHARA) on 1 April 2009, an ever-expanding image databank that is contributed by our members, assembled and supervised by a team of scholarly and librarian editors, and hosted by ArtStor.

This current number of the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* is the first to appear in a parallel online edition, thanks to its current editor David Brownlee and founding editor of *JSAH* online, Hilary Ballon. This achievement can hardly be overestimated, as it paves the way for new forms of scholarly publishing, equipped with high-resolution images, film clips, computer animations, and panoramic representations of architecture, and we aspire to release time-sensitive reviews online in advance the regular publication date. Its new publisher, the University of California Press, expects to apply the strategies and solutions developed for
the JSAH to many other scholarly online publications in the future.

The Buildings of the United States (BUS) series has entered a new partnership with University of Virginia Press and recently published several new volumes. Its editor-in-chief, Karen Kingsley, and the publisher are exploring additional ways of distributing its contents beyond the print volume to digital media and handheld devices. Our website is being redesigned, material for K–12 education is being assembled for students in Illinois, and next year's meeting in New Orleans will be expanded to present six instead of five simultaneous sessions. At the same time, board members expressed great confidence in the society's recent, strategically important initiatives and gratitude for the outstanding leadership, creativity, and resourcefulness of our executive director Pauline Saliga and her excellent team.

To today's Society of Architectural Historians have little in common with the small group that founded it in 1940, or with any exclusive Society of Dilettanti—except, perhaps in our sustained delight in buildings and fellowship, expressed in the original reference to the Italian diletto. Our interactions and annual meetings are characterized by a camaraderie and generosity of spirit that are kindled by our shared enthusiasm for architecture and its history.

While the SAH certainly feels younger and more dynamic than ever, like any septuagenarian it needs and deserves love, care, and sustenance, which we hope our members will give with an ever-increasing sense of engagement and achievement.

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