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topsy-turvy experience of civil war and interregnum and subsequently to the growing intellectual climate of rationalism and atheism after the Restoration.

Peter Heylyn's Seventeenth-Century English Worldview

Peter Craft

PETER HEYLYN'S *COSMOGRAPHIE* (1652) summarizes the collective observations of dozens of European voyagers over a century and averaged more than one new edition per decade between 1652 and 1700. As such it reflects English readers' "common sense" or general knowledge about the world until at least the publication of John Dryden's *Aureng-Zebe* in 1676. Heylyn's work therefore forms a general template of a historically specific worldview in which India's economic prosperity and immense armies make England appear insignificant by comparison. At the same time, Heylyn's work, like other contemporary voyage collections, downplays the role of disease in the European conquest of the New World during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This perspective in turn led to an inflated sense of English power in relation to West "Indians." Heylyn invokes religion and ethics both to excuse England's economic frailty in relation to India and to justify the exploitation of Amerindian peoples. This essay aims to pave the way for studies of popular and canonical works of English fiction during the mid-seventeenth century to suggest how voyage collection editors influenced the bestselling literature of the ensuing decades.

Diamond Jubilee: A History of the New England Renaissance Conference, 1939–2014

Christopher Carlsmith

FOUNDED IN THE SPRING of 1939, the New England Renaissance Conference (NERC) was the first scholarly association in the United States dedicated to study of the Renaissance. The purpose of NERC, then and now, was to promote and disseminate Renaissance Studies in the northeast through an annual meeting. Initially an enclave of senior scholars from prestigious universities, with a narrow focus on high culture, NERC

has evolved during the past seventy-five years to include broader membership and more diverse fields of study. Unlike its sister organizations in other regions of the country, and unlike the national Renaissance Society of America (RSA), NERC has deliberately avoided any kind of permanent structure—it has no constitution, no minutes, no membership fees, no publications, and no fixed office. Drawing from conference programs, professional correspondence, oral interviews, and personal papers, this essay traces the development of NERC from 1939 to 2014.

DIAMOND JUBILEE: A HISTORY OF THE NEW ENGLAND RENAISSANCE CONFERENCE, 1939–2014

Christopher Carlsmith
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Introduction

FOUNDED IN THE spring of 1939, the New England Renaissance Conference (NERC) is the oldest scholarly association in the U.S. dedicated to the study of the Renaissance. Given NERC's lack of institutional structure—it has no constitution, no membership fees, no secretary, no publications, and no fixed location—one may marvel that

I wish to thank Peter Fergusson, Ann Moyer, and Kenneth Gouwens for their willingness to read an early draft of this article, as well as Toubia Ghadessi and the anonymous reader for the American Philosophical Society for substantive comments on the full manuscript. I am grateful to Tara Nummedal for early encouragement and temporary possession of the NERC Archive. I thank John Gilmore for permission to consult the Myron Gilmore Papers at Harvard University Archives. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance of students Meghan Chapman and Derek Winslow, who worked hard to digitize the conference programs and to write preliminary studies of several NERC presidents, and of Emily Jarmolowicz who reorganized the NERC Archive in Spring 2014 and assisted with editing this article. At the annual meeting of the Renaissance Society of America (RSA) in New York in March 2014, Kristin Bezio, Paul Budra, Martine Van Elk, and Tara Nummedal shared their impressions of the different regional Renaissance societies, for which I am very grateful.

it has survived seventy-five years. Despite such limitations, NERC has played a significant role in promoting and disseminating scholarship about the Renaissance, particularly in the region between Boston and New York, and its history is one that deserves closer scrutiny.¹ This essay provides an analytical summary of the history of NERC, with particular focus upon important developments and transitions under each of the conference's leaders from 1939 to 2014. Some of those developments, such as the rise of social history or the advent of computer-aided analysis, are evident across the broader field of Renaissance Studies, but others seem more limited to Renaissance scholars of the Northeast.² Comparisons are also drawn with other regional Renaissance societies in the United States. This essay is based chiefly upon conference programs and professional correspondence within NERC's own archive, as well as material from the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), the Renaissance Society of America (RSA), and other scholarly societies devoted to Renaissance Studies, supplemented by oral interviews, published accounts, and personal papers.³

¹ The only account of NERC's history is F. Edward Cranz, "Fifty Years of the New England Renaissance Conference," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 42 (1989): 749–59, an amusing, quite brief overview first written as a talk for the 50th anniversary of NERC at Harvard in March 1989. A year-by-year "Chronology" of NERC conferences is available at the NERC website: <<http://nercblog.wordpress.com/nerc-archive-project/history-of-nerc>>.

² The historiography of the Renaissance in the USA is a vast topic. For an introduction, see Anthony Molho, "The Italian Renaissance: Made in the USA," in *Imagined Histories: American Historians Interpret the Past*, ed. Molho and Gordon S. Wood (Princeton, 1998), 264–94; Edward Muir, "The Italian Renaissance in America," *American Historical Review*, 100 (1995): 1095–1118; John Jeffries Martin, "The Renaissance: A World in Motion," in *The Renaissance World*, ed. Martin (New York, 2007): 3–27; on earlier interpretations, see DeLamar Jensen, "The 'Renaissance' in Recent Thought: Fifteen Years of Interpretation," *Brigham Young University Studies*, 6 (1964): 1–23. Of course, some changes in Renaissance Studies are also reflected across the entire field of historical study, but that topic is too vast to be considered here.

³ NERC has had no formal archive; some mailing lists and correspondence were passed from one president to another but not in any methodical way. Edward Cranz gathered some material together in 1989; Kenneth Gouwens organized the extant conference programs ca. 2005 during his term as president of NERC. The current "archive" consists primarily of correspondence, conference programs, and related documents; all references in this article, unless indicated otherwise, refer to

The New England Renaissance Conference can be viewed as a case-study of the changing roles of learned societies in the USA, and of the challenges now facing them. In this sense, the example of NERC speaks to major issues in the history of education, institutional history, and intellectual history. Among these issues are those of elitism, and the "opening" of what had been private preserves of certain elite schools, to include wider representation of the profession. The divergent missions of small colleges and large research universities, the rise of state institutions, and the shifting balance between regional and national organizations, are considered here. Also evident are the shifting emphases in geographical, political, and methodological priorities of Renaissance scholars across multiple disciplinary fields. Lastly, analysis of NERC illustrates issues of organizational structure and sustainability, as well as recent attempts at the democratization of scholarship through both technological and traditional means.

Like most academic organizations and scholarly societies, the New England Renaissance Conference was founded by scholars who shared a common intellectual interest and who wished to promote their field of chosen study. Such scholarly societies date back to the "academies" of early modern Europe, or even to the *universitates* of the late Middle Ages. The roots of NERC are similar, albeit a decade or more antecedent, to its sister organizations in other regions, such as the South-Central Renaissance Conference (SCRC, founded 1952), the Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society (PNRS, founded 1956), the Renaissance Conference of Southern California (RCSC, founded ca. 1956–59) or the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association (RMRA, founded 1968).⁴

documents within this NERC archive, which was thoroughly reorganized by Emily Jarmolowicz in Spring 2014. The current archive consists of a total of three boxes. The first two boxes contain the majority of the correspondence, and are organized as a single chronological series separated into folders based primarily on conference year and secondarily by subject. The third box consists of a binder containing available conference programs beginning in 1943. Documents from this archive are identified as "NERCA" followed by the box, folder, and document number(s), e.g., NERCA 1.2.3. Multiple documents in the same folder are identified by letter (e.g., NERCA 1.2.3-B); where necessary, page numbers of individual documents are listed at the end of the citation (e.g., NERCA 1.2.3, 3).

⁴ To the best of my knowledge, none of the other regional scholarly societies of the Renaissance in the USA possesses a comprehensive and documented written history. The PNRS does have a chronology on its website that offers a brief synopsis

Each of these regional scholarly societies, including NERC, is dwarfed by the Renaissance Society of America (founded 1954), the leading organization in North America for the study of the Renaissance. With membership currently numbering about 5,000 scholars, the RSA engages in an array of activities: it publishes the journal *Renaissance Quarterly* and the newsletter *Renaissance News and Notes*; it organizes a major annual meeting each spring for several thousand scholars; it collaborates with libraries and international organizations; and it sponsors book prizes, research grants, and electronic publishing of important primary texts.⁵ It was long believed that NERC (f. 1939) was the original parent of the RSA (f. 1954). As Paul Oskar Kristeller firmly pointed out, however, while there existed a common purpose, and some overlap in the identity of early members, the two organizations were independent of each other from the very beginning.⁶ Nevertheless, NERC can take pride in being a pioneer of

of each conference from 1956–1996, written by Jean MacIntyre, at <<http://www.pnrs.org>>; this will be superseded by the forthcoming article by Paul Budra and Jean MacIntyre, "The Pacific Northwest Renaissance Society," *Renaissance and Reformation*, published by the Canadian Society for Renaissance Studies, which Paul Budra graciously shared with me in advance of publication. The SCRC has an excellent online archive of minutes and programs at <<http://www.scrc.us.com/archives.shtml>>, but no narrative history.

⁵ See the RSA's website: <<http://www.rsa.org>>. As this article went to press, the RSA office began to digitize many of its own documents from the 1930s–1950s, including executive board minutes, bound ledgers with membership information, and extensive correspondence related to the Society. As one might expect, the paper record is particularly strong during and after the RSA's founding in 1954. The RSA is also digitizing some papers pertaining to Leicester Bradner and the ACLS Committee on Renaissance Studies, donated by Paul Oskar Kristeller. The documents do not shed any additional light on the history of NERC but they are a treasure trove for the intellectual history of Renaissance Studies, as well as offering insight into the contributions of major scholars such as Josephine Waters Bennett, W.G. Constable, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and others.

⁶ The original title for Edward Cranz's 1989 talk (n. 1 above) was "Fifty Years of NERC: Parent of the RSA" but this changed upon receipt of Kristeller's stern reproof to Cranz. See Letter from Edward Cranz to Samuel Edgerton (24 Dec. 1988), NERCA 1.25.2: "[Kristeller] says categorically that the NERC is not the parent of the RSA and [he] indicated, kindly but firmly, that the phrase should be omitted from the title." Letter from Edward Cranz to Richard Douglas (8 Feb. 1989), NERCA 1.25.10: "Paul Kristeller, who insisted that the NERC is not the parent of the RSA, sent me some valuable material on the RSA and a little on the NERC." See also Letter from Edward Cranz to Richard Douglas (4 March 1989), NERCA 1.25.12, referring to

Renaissance Studies in the period just before World War II, and in maintaining its (admittedly nebulous) identity for three-quarters of a century.

Foundation and Early Years (1939–1959)

The origins of NERC can be traced to 1937, when the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) convened a group of Renaissance scholars interested in establishing a more formal association.⁷ Leicester Bradner of Brown University was at the heart of this correspondence, and he would remain the leader of NERC for decades to come.⁸ Inspired in part by an address offered to the MLA in December 1936 by Don Cameron Allen on "Desiderata for Further Study of the Renaissance," this small group of scholars declared that "some form of inclusive organization for Renaissance Studies was desirable."⁹ Bradner and his colleagues rejected the idea of a new national society modeled upon the Medieval Academy of America (f. 1925), recommending instead a larger, more representative committee as well as a small executive committee to execute plans and make final decisions.¹⁰ As their report observed, "What is wanted is a body of some sort that will keep track of everything useful that is being

"stern pronouncements from Kristeller making it quite clear that we are not the parent of the RSA." The relationship between NERC and RSA is briefly sketched in the following paragraphs but deserves a more thorough treatment that would include the documents cited in the previous note

⁷ Report on the Conference of Renaissance Studies (Oct. 1937), NERCA 1.25.26-M; the conference occurred 9–10 Oct. 1937 in Chicago with representatives from eight disciplines, after which the report was submitted to the ACLS. See Leicester Bradner's admirably clear summary of this early history from 1936–52: Leicester Bradner, "Renaissance Scholarship in America," *Renaissance News*, 7 (1954): 1–6. See also Letter from Paul Kristeller to Andrew Sabol (29 May 1988), NERCA 1.25.23-C, in which Kristeller summarized the relevant points pertaining to Bradner and to NERC from 1938 to 1947. Kristeller included his original typescript summary and later sent the photocopied pages from the *ACLS Bulletin*; all of this material (in the NERC Archive) is in an envelope addressed to Edward Cranz from Kristeller dated 23 Dec. 1988.

⁸ On Bradner, see n. 18 below.

⁹ Report of the Conference on Renaissance Studies (Oct. 1937), NERCA 1.25.26-M, 1.

¹⁰ Report of the Conference on Renaissance Studies (Oct. 1937), NERCA 1.25.26.M, 2: "a major enterprise like the Medieval Academy is not in this case

done in Renaissance scholarship, and that will determine what more needs to be done and seek to find ways of doing it."¹¹ In 1938 the ACLS created a five-member Committee on Renaissance Studies, which pursued two long-term projects: "(1) a review of the present state of Renaissance scholarship, to be done as a cooperative project, each chapter being written by an expert, and (2) a survey of the resources for the study of the Renaissance in America."¹² In 1944 Bradner succeeded to the position of chairman and held the post for another three years. After several name changes and reformulations, this Committee on Renaissance Studies would ultimately become the RSA in 1954.¹³

In the spring of 1939, Bradner and his committee established the New England Renaissance Conference. According to William G. Constable, who had become the director of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston the previous year, "The basic idea of this [conference] was the importance of bringing together scholars of the Renaissance within a limited area for informal and frank discussion."¹⁴ Constable explained

desirable." Cranz, "Fifty Years," 751–52 (n. 1 above), also summarizes the early history of NERC, utilizing Bradner, "Renaissance Scholarship" as a principal source.

¹¹ Report of the Conference on Renaissance Studies (Oct. 1937), NERCA 1.25.26-M, 1.

¹² Report of the Conference on Renaissance Studies (Oct. 1937), NERCA 1.25.26-M, 2; see also the ACLS *Bulletin*, 27 (1938). The ACLS Committee was very productive: a volume entitled *Surveys of Recent Scholarship in the Field of the Renaissance* was issued in 1945; *Studies in Philology* included an annual bibliography of Renaissance Studies with the committee's support; *Renaissance News* was founded in 1948; and what would become the 8-volume *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum: Medieval and Renaissance Latin Translations and Commentaries* (Washington, DC, 1960–2011), ed. Paul Oskar Kristeller, Edward Cranz, and Virginia Brown, was begun in 1946.

¹³ "The Renaissance Society of America. An Account by the Executive Board," *Renaissance News*, 7 (1954): 7–11; Cranz, "Fifty Years," 751–52. See also Letter from Catherine Rauchenberger to Paul Kristeller (23 Aug. 1988), NERCA 1.25.26-K: "Margaret King asked me to look up the history of Leicester Bradner. He was never on the Executive Board of the Society nor did he serve as President. However, it seems that he was instrumental in the formation of the [Renaissance] Society [of America]."

¹⁴ Letter from William Constable to David Berkowitz (19 April 1966), NERCA 1.1.8. Constable (b. 1887) studied for the bar at Cambridge University but later pursued his studies at the Bartlett School of Architecture. He joined the [British] National Gallery in 1923 as an art historian, became the founding Director of the

that NERC responded to the exigencies of the time period in choosing its format:

To do this [informal, local discussion about the Renaissance] was all the more important since conditions made establishment of a national body practically impossible, and meetings pretty well out of the question. Moreover, the times did not favor elaborate and widespread organization. The note [*sic*] of the NE Conference was that it had no rules, and that each annual meeting was organized exactly as the institution acting as host considered the most practical. Naturally, a certain element of standardization has developed; but from the beginning we insisted on elasticity.¹⁵

From its inception, NERC eschewed most of the trappings of bureaucracy: it charged no membership fee, it published no journal, it maintained no minutes, it kept no archive, and it had only one officer. Its sole goal appears to have been the organization of an annual conference, so that members could share their most recent research with one other. Particularly in recent decades, NERC's commitment to academic minimalism stands in contrast to the impressive achievements of other Renaissance societies, which have established peer-reviewed journals, scholarships, annual awards, regular newsletters, and attractive websites. But NERC was determined to stay simple: as Richard Douglas of MIT phrased it in his 1989 letter to Edward Cranz:

The New England Renaissance Conference has flourished through years of graceful disarray, to the point at times when it has almost denied itself a coherent past. One organization in Modern America that manages without constitution or structure of any kind, but it turns out to be very durable.¹⁶

Courtauld Institute in 1930, and left the Courtauld in 1937, whereupon he became Curator of Paintings at the Boston MFA in 1938 until his retirement in 1957.

¹⁵ Letter from Constable to Berkowitz (19 April 1966), NERCA 1.1.8.

¹⁶ Letter from Richard Douglas to Edward Cranz (15 March 1989), NERCA 1.25.13.

The New England Renaissance Conference was the only local conference group to be directly sponsored by the ACLS committee, but it served as an example for similar societies in North Carolina (1943), New York (1944), Middle West (1945), Philadelphia (1948), and South-Central (1952). In his brief memoir of this early history, Leicester Bradner observed that these annual regional conferences "exhibit a healthy variety of organization and constitute the most important Renaissance activity now going on in America."¹⁷

Leicester Bradner (1939–1959)

As noted above, Leicester Bradner was the guiding force behind the establishment of NERC in the late 1930s.¹⁸ In addition to his seminal role within NERC, he led the ACLS Committee on Renaissance Studies as well as the Brown Renaissance Colloquium. A professor of literature with wide-ranging interests, his most important work was the *Musae Anglicanae: A History of Anglo-Latin Poetry, 1500–1925*, published in 1940; he also wrote on Spencer's *Faerie Queene* and on Renaissance theatre, as well as co-authoring a book on the epigrams of Thomas More. According to an obituary penned by Bradner's son, shortly after Leicester Bradner's retirement in 1968 one of his former students referred to him as "our Renaissance Man"—a fitting title for the man who created NERC. This admiration for Bradner as a scholar who was conversant in many different fields was echoed by his Brown colleague, Elmer Blistein, in the foreword to a Festschrift in honor of Bradner: "[he was] that rare type,

¹⁷ Bradner, "Renaissance Scholarship," 4 (n. 7 above).

¹⁸ On Bradner's career and personality, see Paul Oskar Kristeller's memorial in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 41 (1988): 777–78, a draft of which was sent by Kristeller to Cranz (23 Dec. 1988), NERCA 1.25.26–J. See also the obituaries sent to Cranz on 3 March 1989 by Andrew Sobol: a "Memorial Minute" offered to the Brown Faculty Senate by Elmer M. Blistein (3 May 1988), NERCA 1.25.23–E; a brief anonymous obituary published in the [Providence?] *Evening Bulletin* (13 April 1988), NERCA 1.25.23–B; and an obituary authored by son Rev. Lawrence Bradner (undated), NERCA 1.25.23–F. See also the draft of Robert "Sparks" Sorlien's remembrance, mailed to Edward Cranz by Sorlien (14 Feb. 1989), NERCA 1.25.18–B, intended for publication in the biannual international journal *Moreana*.

the specialist who is, at the same time the genuinely competent utility infielder."¹⁹

Bradner and his colleague Harcourt Brown of the French Department organized NERC's first conference at Brown University in April 1940. The speakers were Harcourt Brown on science, William G. Constable on art, Wallace Ferguson on history, and Paul Oskar Kristeller on letters. One could hardly ask for a more impressive roster of scholars for an inaugural conference! Ferguson published his first views on the Renaissance in a monograph that same year and amplified them eight years later in a historiographical classic.²⁰ Kristeller's contribution, "The Study of the Philosophies of the Renaissance," appeared in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* the following year,²¹ while Harcourt Brown later looked back to 1940–41 as a watershed moment in his own career and in the history of science.²² No extant program exists for this event but it seems likely that it followed the two-day, four-paper format so popular at subsequent NERC events.²³ The ACLS Committee on Renaissance

¹⁹ Elmer Blistein, foreword to *The Drama of the Renaissance: Essays for Leicester Bradner* (Providence, 1971), viii.

²⁰ Wallace K. Ferguson, *The Renaissance* (New York, 1940); idem, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought: Five Centuries of Interpretation* (Boston, 1948).

²¹ Letter from Paul Kristeller to Edward Cranz (20 March 1989), NERCA 1.25.27: "I have a list of the lectures given by me. It lists two papers for the New England Renaissance Conference at Brown University on April 13, 1940: Manuscript materials for Italian humanism, and (with J[ohn H.] Randall) a survey of the present state of scholarship on Renaissance philosophy. I suppose this was the first New England Renaissance Conference. Apart from Bradner himself, [Roland] Bainton and Randall were surely active in getting me on the program. I was far too new to have had any influence at that stage....Harcourt Brown probably was active in advising Bradner and in making local arrangements at Brown, but he was not a member of the ACLS committee....I am sure Bradner organized the first conference in 1940 and had it sponsored and perhaps partly financed by the committee of which he was then the secretary [i.e., the ACLS Committee on Renaissance Studies]. I am not able to say more."

²² Paul O. Kristeller and John H. Randall, Jr. "The Study of the Philosophies of the Renaissance." *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2 (1941): 449–496, as cited in *Philosophy and Humanism: Renaissance Essays in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. Edward P. Mahoney (Leiden, 1976), 547. Harcourt Brown, "The Renaissance and Historians of Science," *Studies in the Renaissance*, 7 (1960): 27–42, esp. 27–28.

²³ In preparing his remarks for the 50th anniversary of NERC in 1989 (see n. 1 above), Edward Cranz sent at least a dozen letters to colleagues asking for information and documents about the early history of NERC, and especially for the 1940 program; he received quite a bit of material but not the 1940 program. As he put it in

Studies noted in its 1941 annual report that "The Committee has stimulated an interest in conferences on the problems of Renaissance Studies in various parts of the country...[A] very successful conference was held at Brown University in April. Several members of the Committee participated in this conference, and the interest and active cooperation of scholars in several fields can be reported."²⁴ The report pointed out that conferences on Renaissance Studies were also planned in Chicago and at the Huntington Library, and proclaimed "These conferences...are, we think, very effective means of furthering the ends for which the Committee was appointed."

The second meeting of NERC was at Connecticut College in 1941, with reported attendance of fifty scholars. Leicester Bradner deemed this conference to be "very successful," although his annual report to the ACLS noted that "Attempts to stimulate conferences in other regions have not as yet been successful. For the present, in view of the national emergency [i.e., WW II], they are not being pushed any further."²⁵ The NERC soldiered on: the third conference was at Yale in 1942, the fourth at Harvard in 1943, and the fifth at Brown in 1944.²⁶

Immediately apparent is the limited academic circle in which Renaissance studies was conducted in this era: with the exception of Connecticut College as noted above, it was the Ivy League institutions that dominated the opening decades of the New England Renaissance Conference. For example, of the twenty-one conferences sponsored by NERC between 1950 and 1970, just under half (9/21) were held at Ivy League institutions (Harvard, Yale, Brown, Dartmouth). By contrast, during the 1970s and most of the 1980s no Ivy League institution hosted NERC; it only returned

a letter of 5 April 1989 to Samuel Edgerton, NERCA 1.25.5, "I beat the bushes far and wide, and the result was very encouraging." Cranz promised to return material gathered from Jane Ruby, Dick Douglas, Paul Kristeller, Andy Sabol, Bill Dinneen, and other early participants in NERC, to Sam Edgerton (NERC's president, 1985-90); Cranz added parenthetically "You might as well put them into the archivall [sic] file, so someone can puzzle over them for the hundredth anniversary."

²⁴ Archer Taylor, "Committee on Renaissance Studies, Report of Activities, 1940" [Annex 8], *ACLS Bulletin*, 33 (1941): 88-89 (also paginated as 536-37).

²⁵ Leicester Bradner, "Committee on Renaissance Studies, Report of Activities, 1941" [Annex 11], *ACLS Bulletin*, 35 (1942): 86-87 (also paginated as 756-57).

²⁶ *ACLS Bulletin*, 33 (1941): 88-89; *ibid.*, 35 (1942): 86-87 (also paginated as 756-57); *ibid.*, 36 (1944): 21, 80; *ibid.*, 38 (1945): 82-83.

to Harvard in 1989 on account of the fiftieth anniversary of the organization and the desire to have a grand celebration.²⁷ This trend has continued to the present day; Yale was the only Ivy League institution to host in the 1990s (1991) while Brown hosted twice (2002, 2007) in the following decade. The tendency has clearly been for other New England colleges and universities to host the conference during the past thirty years, from major research universities (Boston University, University of Connecticut, UMass Amherst) to liberal arts colleges (Wheaton College, Wesleyan University). Such a trend has been explicitly encouraged by the immediate past presidents of NERC, Tara Nummedal and Kenneth Gouwens, respectively. Both expressed support for pushing NERC out to other institutions that have not traditionally hosted, as a means to "democratize" the study of the Renaissance, and also to encourage those scholars more likely to be working without a group of like-minded colleagues.²⁸ In other parts of the country, where no cadre of schools equivalent to the Ivy League exists, it has chiefly been the major state universities and colleges that have hosted the regional Renaissance societies.

It is also worth noting that NERC's perennial lack of a budget requires the host institution to bear all costs associated with the conference; thus sharing the conference among a wider swath of institutions makes financial sense by reducing the burden upon a small group of repeat hosts. The other regional Renaissance societies, with one notable exception, have followed a similar pattern of rotating hosts. The SCRC has moved its meeting virtually every year since 1953, as has the RMRRA and the PNRS (the latter stipulates that its annual meeting must alternate between Canada and the USA each year). The lone exception is the Renaissance Conference of Southern California (RCSC), which has for years met at the Huntington Library in San Marino.

To return to the early history of NERC: the 1943 program specifies that the conference, held at Harvard's Houghton Library, "is designed to bring

²⁷ The 1989 conference was originally to be at Brown but was transferred to Harvard somewhat abruptly; see the collection of 6 letters from 10 May 1984 to 2 Sept. 1985 sent by Jane Ruby to Edward Cranz on 17 Feb. 1989, which document how the conference was unexpectedly moved from Providence to Cambridge, NERCA 1.25.

²⁸ Oral interviews conducted with Kenneth Gouwens (14 Jan. 2013) in Cambridge, and with Tara Nummedal (15 Jan. 2013) in Providence; summaries are at the NERC Archive, NERCA 2.28.1-2.

together workers in varied disciplines in the period of the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries."²⁹ A group dinner at the Harvard Faculty Club was followed by two talks: Theodore Spencer of Harvard on "Shakespeare and Intellectual History," and Howard Mumford Jones of Harvard on the topic "American Origins and the Renaissance." Accommodation was offered at the Hotel Statler in Boston for the princely sum of \$4.40 per person. Saturday morning witnessed another pair of talks: Harry Levin of Harvard spoke on "Jonson's Metempsychosis" while book collector and investor Imrie de Vegh of Washington, D.C. described the career of the sixteenth-century Hungarian humanist and book collector Johannes Sambucus.³⁰ Following the morning talks, the entire group adjourned to a buffet luncheon at a private house on Garden Street, and then reconvened at Houghton Library in mid-afternoon for a concert of Renaissance music given by Erwin Bodky and musicians from the Boston Symphony Orchestra.

The 1943 program has been described in some detail because it encapsulates several important themes for the early history of NERC, some of

²⁹ Conference Program (1943), NERCA 3.1. Given the rarefied nature of this NERC meeting, the choice of the word "workers" here, rather than "scholars" or "researchers," is an interesting one.

³⁰ It is not possible to document all of those who presented at NERC but I include here a brief description of Imrie de Vegh as he was a most unusual participant, coming from outside the academy and outside New England. As cited in James E. Walsh, *A Catalogue of the Fifteenth-Century Printed Books in the Harvard University Library*, vol. 5 (Tempe, AZ, 1997), 46: "Born in Budapest in 1906, Imrie de Vegh (as he preferred to spell his name, the Hungarian form being Imre) earned an LL.D. at the University of Budapest in 1928 and then spent two years of further study at Trinity College, Cambridge. Moving to the United States, he worked as an economist with the New York firm of Scudder, Stevens & Clark for ten years. During World War II he was a member of the War Production Board. After the war he founded his own firm, de Vegh & Co., and was president and director of the de Vegh Mutual Fund until his premature death from lung cancer in 1962. He was a discriminating book collector and concentrated on works illustrating the history of ideas in all periods and parts of the world. One of his special interests was Johannes Sambucus (Janos Samboky), a fellow Hungarian (1531–1584), a humanist, and an important collector of books and manuscripts, whose collection on his death passed to what is now the Nationalbibliothek in Vienna. De Vegh assembled an impressive number of Sambucus's works, which he gave to the Harvard Library. His gifts of thirty-four incunabula might seem a miscellaneous lot, but looked at closely they will reveal his concern to bring together books that illustrate unusual and sometimes fantastic workings of the human mind."

which would later be echoed by other regional learned societies. First, both the location (in Cambridge) and the affiliation of the speakers (3/4 from Harvard) testify to the dominance of the Ivy League in the opening decades of NERC. Second, the speakers in these early decades were always established professors; graduate students were never invited to speak. Third, the inclusion of an afternoon concert of Renaissance music foreshadows a trend in these NERC conferences to include a poetry reading, a theatrical production, or a musical ensemble to entertain and edify conference participants about high Renaissance culture. Such cultural entertainment has continued to be featured in more recent NERC gatherings, as well as in those of its sister societies. For example, the RMRRA routinely holds its meetings in conjunction with the Utah Shakespeare Festival, and the PNRS annual meeting has long had a tradition of performing a fully-staged play or else a community reading of a play.

Virtually all NERC conferences from 1943–1983 were two-day affairs on a Friday and Saturday, with plenty of time for socializing and cultural attractions. The Renaissance societies elsewhere in the USA have always hosted two-day conferences, and continue to do so today. By contrast, the past decade or so (2000–2013) has seen a decided preference for NERC to host a one-day Saturday conference, presumably to better accommodate the reality of increased professional pressure and domestic demands upon conference participants. It may be that the regional conferences in less densely-populated areas, such as the West, have continued to be two-day events both because the travel distances are substantially greater and because there is less competition from other events or institutions with similar foci.

It is worth noting, too, that there were only four papers offered at this 1943 NERC conference, which seems a low number for a regional conference extending over two days. It suggests—but we cannot easily verify such a hypothesis—that conference papers of the mid-twentieth century were perhaps more weighty and required more preparation by the speakers (or more digestion by the listeners) than is the norm today.³¹ NERC has almost always limited the number of papers to the single digits; other

³¹ The comments of Myron Gilmore and other NERC presidents support the interpretation that conference papers were more substantial—in the 1950s and 1960s the papers were often 40–45 minutes in length, and scholars routinely spent years investigating a particular topic before being invited to speak.

Renaissance conferences (e.g., PNRS, RMRRA) have in recent decades often solicited more papers and run concurrent panels, with more recent conferences featuring 45–70 papers in a single weekend.³²

We have no record of the NERC conferences held in the immediate post-war period from 1945 to 1947; the next few were held at Dartmouth (1949), Mt. Holyoke (1950), Brown (1951), Harvard (1952), and Yale (1953).³³ Nor do we have extant copies of the program again until 1954 when the annual meeting convened at Wellesley College in mid-November under the direction of M. Ruth Michael. At Wellesley, three of the five speakers were from Harvard, including art historian Millard Meiss and literary scholar Herbert Dieckmann, as well as Latin professor Dorothy Robathan of Wellesley who spoke about “Renaissance Reactions to a Literary Forgery of the Thirteenth Century.” An exhibition of various editions of English Renaissance poetry in the college library, and a chamber music concert in the evening by Hubert Lamb, provided entertainment for the conference attendees.³⁴

In 1955 the conference moved to nearby Tufts University under the direction of Harold Blanchard. The program was similar, featuring three talks on Friday afternoon followed by cocktails, an exhibition of Renaissance paintings, a group dinner at the faculty club, and a theater performance. An undergraduate theater group called Pen, Paint, and Pretzels offered a “Jacobean comedy burlesque” in three acts, described in the playbill as “a pastiche of current popular romantic plays and fiction . . .

³² One should notice also that the RSA has steadily ballooned in size in recent years, with the 2014 conference registering nearly 3,000 scholars in New York. Thus it may well be NERC that is anomalous here in maintaining what John Paoletti later referred to as NERC’s “small-town quality”.

³³ The conference at Mt. Holyoke occurred 5–6 May 1950 (*Renaissance News*, 2 [1950]: 78). The 27–28 April 1951 Brown conference included papers by Cranz, Kristeller, and Bradner (*Renaissance News*, 4 [1951]: 10–11); in addition, “At the business meeting Leicester Bradner (Brown) was appointed a one-man clearing house for future annual meetings” (*Renaissance News*, 4 [1951], 20). The conference on 9–10 May 1952 was organized by John Coolidge (Art) and Myron Gilmore (History); in honor of the quincentenary of Leonardo da Vinci’s birth, the theme was “Science in the Civilization of the Renaissance” with papers on Paracelsus, Claudius Ptolemy, and Renaissance theories of generation (*Renaissance News*, 5 [1952]: 18). The 1953 conference was held 30–31 October at Yale.

³⁴ In addition to the conference program in the NERC Archive (1954), NERCA 3.1, see *Renaissance News*, 7 (1954): 111.

[that] also pokes fun at the playgoing tastes and manners of London’s rising merchant class.”³⁵ The conference struck a more serious note on Saturday morning with a talk by Paul Oskar Kristeller about apocryphal sources of Renaissance Platonism, and a report from Myron Gilmore (who would assume the presidency of NERC in 1959) on the Sept. 1955 meeting of the International Congress of Historical Sciences and on the proposal to create an edition of the Medici correspondence in Florence (the eventual Medici Archive Project).³⁶

The 1956 conference moved west to Amherst College for a mid-October meeting. The focus remained on the traditional fields of Italian history and art, as well as English literature, with talks by Leona Gabel (Smith), Raymond de Roover (Boston College), Frederick Lane (Johns Hopkins), Leicester Bradner (Brown), and Caesar Barber (Amherst College). The Amherst Glee Club offered a brief program of Renaissance choral music. Connecticut College hosted the 1957 conference in New London, with a program organized by Edward Cranz that turned toward religion and humanism: Richard Douglas (Amherst College, subsequently at MIT) spoke about the humanist and religious reformer Jacopo Sadoletto, and Wilhelm Pauck of the Union Theological Seminary presented his findings about Martin Luther’s biblical exegesis. The Palestrina Society of Connecticut College sang the “Quaeramus cum pastoribus” Mass by Cristóbal Morales after an evening visit to view Renaissance drawings in the college’s own collection.³⁷

Dartmouth College hosted NERC for second time in 1958 with an interdisciplinary panel of medieval and Renaissance topics. Vernon Hall Jr. of Dartmouth opened the Friday session with an exhibition of Renaissance medals, followed by a lecture on Trecento music by his colleague Royal MacDonald and then a talk on “The Genesis of ‘Barocco,’ a German Style” by S. Lane Faison Jr. (Williams College). The following morning

³⁵ In addition to the conference program and playbill (1955), NERCA 3.1, see *Renaissance News*, 8 (1955): 222–23.

³⁶ Letters from Harold Blanchard to Myron Gilmore (4 May 1955), NERCA 1.2.1; (9 June 1955), NERCA 1.2.2.; and (13 Aug. 1955), NERCA 1.2.4; replies from Myron Gilmore to Harold Blanchard (3 Aug. 1955), NERCA 1.2.3. and (23 Aug. 1955), NERCA 1.2.5.

³⁷ A thorough summary of the 1957 meeting was recorded in *Renaissance News*, 10 (1957): 223–24; the typescript program is in the NERC Archive (1957), NERCA 3.1.

witnessed another contribution from Paul Oskar Kristeller, this time on Renaissance Manuscripts in Eastern Europe, and a talk by Stephen Gilman (Harvard) about the metamorphosis of medieval death imagery in the *Coplas* of fifteenth-century Spaniard Jorge Manrique.³⁸

These conferences of the 1950s thus confirm the picture that was first sketched out at Brown, Harvard, and elsewhere in the prior decade: a relatively small conference with important professors from elite institutions, focused on topics of high Renaissance culture. Socializing and entertainment were just as important as the papers themselves. Italy and England remained the preferred locales of study, with lesser attention to Spain, France, and the rest of Europe. Conferences alternated between fall and spring; the choice of dates, subjects, speakers, and entertainment was largely at the discretion of the conference host each year. As noted previously, several Renaissance societies were founded in the 1950s but the absence of conference programs in those early years makes it difficult to compare them with NERC.

The decision to limit NERC membership was a conscious one by Leicester Bradner, in which he was supported by the members of a small *ad hoc* committee.³⁹ As noted by Brown history professor William F. Church in a letter to Myron Gilmore of Harvard, "Leicester and the committee apparently feel that it is decidedly preferable to keep the group a small, informal one, with emphasis on selectivity, and discussions at the meetings, rather than permitting the organization to grow in size to the point of being something that anyone can join merely by paying dues and securing automatic membership."⁴⁰ As noted below, this issue of membership would soon become a "red hot potato"⁴¹ and would remain a contentious issue for decades.

Leicester Bradner remained the tireless, behind-the-scenes organizer of NERC from 1939 to 1959. In his final year (1959), he organized a twentieth-anniversary conference at Brown, featuring the original

³⁸ Conference Program (1958), NERCA 3.1.

³⁹ The committee included William Dinneen (Brown), Richard Douglas (Amherst), and Grace Hawks (Wellesley); see Letter from William Church to Myron Gilmore (8 Nov. 1958), NERCA 1.1.1, 1.

⁴⁰ Letter from Church to Gilmore, (8 Nov. 1958), NERCA 1.1.1, 1.

⁴¹ The phrase "red hot potato" was used in a letter from William Dinneen to Myron Gilmore (24 April 1959), NERCA 1.1.5 to refer to the debate over membership size.

four speakers from the 1940 conference. At this commemoration of two decades of NERC, all four scholars—Harcourt Brown, William Constable, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Wallace Ferguson—spoke on the theme of "Progress in Renaissance Scholarship in the Last Twenty Years."⁴² A "Concert of Renaissance Music" at Manning Chapel, arranged by organist and professor of music William Dinneen, occurred on Friday evening.⁴³

The fall 1959 conference was a watershed in several ways. First, NERC had survived two decades and was now flanked by both the RSA and other regional Renaissance societies in the South and the West. Second, this conference marked the last time that Leicester Bradner would be at the helm of NERC. Third, archival records after 1959 are more numerous and provide greater insight into how the organization developed. Lastly, the 1960s witnessed the diffusion of Renaissance Studies to a wider array of colleges and universities, as the graduate students of Ivy League schools fanned out to state universities and liberal arts colleges across the country. Of course, the 1960s was a decade marked by radical social upheaval, and some of those changes spilled over into how the Renaissance was conceived, studied, and taught. Such changes become more evident in the presidencies of those who succeeded Leicester Bradner: they include Myron Gilmore, David Berkowitz, Jane Ruby, and Samuel Edgerton.

The Middle Years (1959–1989)

Myron P. Gilmore (1959–1964)

Historian Myron Gilmore of Harvard University was Leicester Bradner's hand-picked successor to lead the New England Renaissance Conference. William Church described Gilmore as "a man of stature . . . [with] contacts in the field" who had already established a formidable reputation

⁴² Harcourt Brown, "The Renaissance and Historians of Science" (n. 23 above); Wallace K. Ferguson, "The Reinterpretation of the Renaissance" in *Facets of the Renaissance*, ed. Ferguson and W. H. Werkmeister (Los Angeles, 1959), 1–18; Kristeller contributed an essay on Renaissance Platonism to *Facets of the Renaissance* but it's not clear if it was the paper presented at NERC in 1959.

⁴³ Conference Program (1959), NERCA 3.1, 1–2.

in early modern European history.⁴⁴ In offering the position of chairman to Myron Gilmore in early November 1958, Church wrote that the new chairman "would merely be required to keep the *ad hoc* committee alive (if necessary), write a letter or two..., and keep track of the list of members."⁴⁵ Church soft-pedaled the extent of the Chairman's responsibilities, writing that the conference "seems to be quite self-perpetuating" and that "there seems to be very little in the way of specific work."⁴⁶ Gilmore was not so easily fooled, however, and he responded directly to Bradner with a pointed question about precisely how much work would be involved.⁴⁷ Gilmore also made clear his reservations about the exclusivity of Bradner's membership list for NERC.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, with some reluctance, Gilmore agreed to take on the office in the winter of 1959.

It soon became clear that Gilmore would seek continuity with some of Bradner's policies while establishing decisively different approaches in other areas. For example, Gilmore noted that Bradner had "always very sensibly followed a principle of decentralization" in terms of delegating work to the individual conference hosts.⁴⁹ Gilmore too believed that the program chairman should have great latitude in determining the

⁴⁴ Letter from Church to Gilmore (8 Nov. 1958), NERCA 1.1.1, 1. Gilmore earned both an M.A. (1933) and a Ph.D. (1937) from Harvard, where he continued to teach except for three years of military service during WW II. He served as Chair of the Harvard History Department (1955–56, 1957–60), and subsequently as director of Harvard's Villa I Tatti (1964–73). He published five books on humanism and political thought in the Renaissance. Although his leadership of NERC lasted only five years, there is a remarkably good collection of correspondence for the heart of his tenure there (1960–62).

⁴⁵ Letter from Church to Gilmore (8 Nov. 1958), NERCA 1.1.1, 1.

⁴⁶ Letter from Church to Gilmore (8 Nov. 1958), NERCA 1.1.1, 1–2.

⁴⁷ Letter from Myron Gilmore to Leicester Bradner, with copy to W. F. Church (26 Nov. 1958), NERCA 1.1.2. "I should like to have some frank discussion with you before I agree to take on this additional responsibility. In the first place, I would naturally want to know more precisely how much work is involved."

⁴⁸ Letter from Myron Gilmore to Leicester Bradner (26 Nov. 1958), NERCA 1.1.2: "I sympathize with the desire to keep the group small and informal, and to limit the meetings to those actively interested. On the other hand, I do see some force in the argument that those who have paid dues to the large organization [i.e., the RSA] feel that they should be on the mailing list of the New England group, and I am not sure that I should wish to assume the chairmanship with any understanding of a commitment to adhere to the former policy."

⁴⁹ Letter from Gilmore to Bradner (26 Nov. 1958), NERCA 1.1.2.

conference schedule each year. Gilmore also favored Bradner's practice of a small *ad hoc* committee to provide advice, and asked to keep the same members in place.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Gilmore continued Bradner's efforts to make NERC an interdisciplinary group rather than privileging one discipline or another. Like Bradner, Gilmore seemed reluctant to rule by fiat, proposing that any changes to the term or the role of the chairman and his advisory group should be voted upon by the entire membership, not decided unilaterally by the NERC chairman.

On the other hand, the issues of "exclusivity" and "formality" were ones about which Gilmore felt quite differently than Bradner. As noted above, Gilmore had expressed reservations about continuing to follow Bradner's elitist approach to the mailing list.⁵¹ In April 1959—just a few weeks after Gilmore had agreed to serve as NERC Chairman—Bradner circulated for review by Gilmore and others of the inner circle a policy statement that summarized Bradner's view of the relationship between the RSA and NERC.⁵² Bradner saw the two organizations as distinct, and argued that dues paid to one did not automatically entitle one to benefits (such as one's name on the mailing list) from the other. The subtext here was Bradner's effort to limit those who could be on NERC's mailing list; Bradner routinely removed the names of those who had not attended the conference in the previous three to four years. Bradner referred to these non-participants as "deadheads who never come, [who] ought to be cut off."⁵³ Gilmore disagreed; in his reply to Bradner about the policy statement, Gilmore gently suggested that all interested persons should be allowed to submit their names.⁵⁴ In subsequent years, Gilmore regularly sought to expand the mailing list to include young faculty or recent arrivals in New England.

⁵⁰ Letter from Gilmore to Bradner (6 May 1959), NERCA 1.1.7; Letter from Myron Gilmore to William Dinneen (6 May 1959), NERCA 1.1.6.

⁵¹ Letter from Myron Gilmore to Leicester Bradner, with copy to W. F. Church (26 Nov. 1958), NERCA 1.1.2.

⁵² "The New England Conference on the Renaissance and The Renaissance Society of America: An Explanation" (n.d.), NERCA 1.1.3-B, n.a., but internal references (e.g., "this is the way it has operated for the last twenty years") make clear it is by Bradner. This policy statement was accompanied by a pair of brief letters from Bradner to Gilmore (9 April 1959), NERCA 1.1.3-A and (20 April 1959), NERCA 1.1.4, in which Bradner sought to justify the necessity of such a statement.

⁵³ Letter from Bradner to Gilmore (20 April 1959), NERCA 1.1.4.

⁵⁴ Letter from Gilmore to Bradner (6 May 1959), NERCA 1.1.7: "As I said to you when we last met, I think the notice you propose to publish in the Bulletin [i.e.,

The October 1959 conference at Brown had already been organized by the time Gilmore took office, so he focused on organizing the next meeting at Harvard in the spring of 1961. He hoped to have one session on the fifteenth century, another on the sixteenth century, and a third on Church Fathers in the Renaissance. In late September 1960, he wrote to a group of Harvard colleagues, including Reformation historian Heiko Oberman, literary scholar Douglas Bush, curator Philip Hofer, librarian William Jackson, art historian Sydney Freedberg, and literary critic Harry Levin, to solicit recommendations for speakers.⁵⁵ The suggestions that he received indicate who was already considered a senior figure (e.g., Erwin Panofsky) and who was considered to be a "rising star" in 1960 (e.g., W. R. Rearick, Walter Kaiser, Dante Della Terza). The letters also demonstrate that Gilmore was indeed the "man of stature" that the *ad hoc* committee had sought in its new chairman, with connections across multiple academic disciplines. Gilmore encountered several obstacles in recruiting speakers; art historian Frederick Hartt suffered a "severe accident to [his] right arm" necessitating an operation just three months before the conference, for example, and art historian James Holderbaum simultaneously withdrew due to a scheduling conflict.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Gilmore was able to draw upon his extensive list of contacts to put together an impressive roster of speakers.⁵⁷

It is clear that Gilmore had firm ideas about the content of the 1961 program. For an opening session on the humanist idea of Christian antiquity, he asked historian Hanna Holborn Gray at the University

Renaissance News] might contain an additional invitation to all interested persons to send in their names."

⁵⁵ Letter from Myron Gilmore to "Dear Colleagues" (28 Sept. 1960), NERCA 1.3.1. His colleagues responded promptly: see Letter from Douglas Bush to Myron Gilmore (25 Oct. 1960), NERCA 1.3.10; Letter from Heiko Oberman to Myron Gilmore (13 Oct. 1960), NERCA 1.3.8; Letter from Sydney Freedberg to Myron Gilmore (4 Oct. 1960), NERCA 1.3.4; Letter from Philip Hofer to Myron Gilmore (4 Oct. 1960), NERCA 1.3.3; Letter from Harry Levin to Myron Gilmore (5 Oct. 1960), NERCA 1.3.9.

⁵⁶ Letter from Frederick Hartt to Myron Gilmore (24 Jan. 1961), NERCA 1.3.35; and Gilmore's reply (2 Feb. 1961), NERCA 1.3.34. See also the letter from James Holderbaum to Myron Gilmore (31 Dec. 1960), NERCA 1.3.21, and Gilmore's reply (9 Jan. 1961), NERCA 1.3.25.

⁵⁷ Conference Program (1961), NERCA 3.1.

of Chicago to give a paper on "Lorenzo Valla and his Circle."⁵⁸ Gray responded that such a title was "misleading" because of the difficulty of identifying exactly who was (and was not) a member of Valla's circle; she proposed "Lorenzo Valla and his Contemporaries" instead.⁵⁹ Gilmore paired this topic with a paper by Cornell historian Eugene Rice, Jr. (later Executive Director of the RSA) on "Lefevre D'Etaples and his Circle."⁶⁰ The correspondence makes clear that Gilmore shared a deep friendship with each of these scholars. It is also clear that the traditional view of the Renaissance, with an emphasis upon humanism and the "great men" of the period, remained a dominant view in 1961, even as Gilmore and others were beginning to conceptualize a new idea of how to study the Renaissance.⁶¹ Gilmore next convinced his Harvard colleague Walter Kaiser to give a paper related to that evening's theatrical production of *The Alchemist*, entitled "The Alembic of Satire."⁶² Attendance was estimated at 100 to 150 people for each of the sessions and for the show. Three additional papers on the later Italian Renaissance, and an exhibition about Ariosto at the Houghton Library, rounded out the weekend.

Gilmore's correspondence demonstrates skill at identifying future conference hosts for NERCA, and at mediating between them when

⁵⁸ Letters from Myron Gilmore to Hanna Gray (15 Nov. 1960), NERCA 1.3.12, and (7 March 1961), NERCA 1.3.47.

⁵⁹ Letters from Hanna Gray to Myron Gilmore (28 Nov. 1960), NERCA 1.3.17, and (8 March 1961), NERCA 1.3.49.

⁶⁰ Letters from Myron Gilmore to Eugene Rice (15 Nov. 1960), NERCA 1.3.13, (5 Jan. 1961), NERCA 1.3.23, and (7 March 1961), NERCA 1.3.48; reply from Eugene Rice to Myron Gilmore (undated but likely Dec. 1960), NERCA 1.3.14, notes that Rice would be "very happy" to return to Cambridge.

⁶¹ See the comments of John O'Malley about Gilmore's teaching in 1961: "Paul Grendler and the Triumph of the Renaissance: A Reminiscence and Some Thoughts," in *The Renaissance in the Streets, Schools, and Studios: Essays in Honor of Paul F. Grendler*, ed. Nicholas Terpstra and Konrad Eisenbichler (Toronto, 2008), 323–44, esp. 324.

⁶² Letter from Walter Kaiser to Myron Gilmore (18 Jan. 1961), NERCA 1.3.32; Kaiser noted that in trying to define a topic about alchemy, he had already read Petrarch, Chaucer, Bruno, Agrippa, Flamel, Cardanus, Arnoldus of Villa Nova, Paracelsus, Delrio, and even Jung; he observed wryly that "If all else fails, I can always perform an alchemical experiment and transmute a base metal or two for the edification of the assembled company!"

conflicts arose.⁶³ For the spring of 1962 Gilmore convinced a young Charles Nauert to organize a conference at Williams College.⁶⁴ Visiting professor of art John Pope-Hennessy anchored that conference with a talk on Renaissance bronze statuettes. The Chapin Library at Williams hosted a session on Renaissance books, which complemented another session on historical manuscripts; there was also a session on the *siglo de oro* in Spain. The location of the 1962 conference in Western Massachusetts extended (albeit only slightly) the Harvard-Yale-Brown triangle that had recently dominated NERC. Although half of the speakers were from Harvard and Brown, speakers from the University of Missouri, the University of Toronto, and UMass Amherst were also present.

In 1963 NERC landed at Brandeis, where an ambitious conference hosted by David Berkowitz foreshadowed his elevation to the presidency of NERC in the following year (on which see more below). The surviving archival evidence suggests that Myron Gilmore was a forceful and strong-minded leader, but one who was unfailingly courteous. Gilmore's correspondence demonstrates that he sometimes instructed his colleagues about an appropriate title for a NERC conference paper rather than asking for suggestions from them. His statements about the independence of NERC from the RSA reflect similarly strong opinions about what was best for the organization. Gilmore did not share with Bradner the view that NERC should be just an elite organization of scholars. Gilmore continued to participate in NERC until shortly before his death in 1978.⁶⁵ Myron Gilmore thus provided direction and strong leadership to NERC at a time when both were necessary; his term of five years has

⁶³ E.g., Gilmore's correspondence with Ruth Kennedy of Smith College (15 Dec. 1962), NERCA 1.5.4, (28 Dec. 1962) NERCA 1.5.5, (21 Feb. 1961), NERCA 1.4.3, (2 March 1961), NERCA 1.4.5, and (1 June 1962), NERCA 1.5.7, who moved the date of the conference three times; Gilmore observed to Charles Garside on 4 Jan. 1963 that he was "rather irritated" with the "Smith ladies" who could not make up their minds, NERCA 1.5.8.

⁶⁴ Nauert left for the Univ. of Missouri in Fall 1961, but did much of the preparatory work and returned to chair a session at Williams. See the collegial correspondence (8 letters) between Gilmore and Nauert (4 March 1961 through 19 Apr. 1962), NERCA 1.4.6-7; 1.4.9-10; 1.4.14-15; and 1.4.17.

⁶⁵ Gilmore gave a paper at the 1973 NERC entitled "Erasmus on Images and the Council of Trent"; he moderated a panel discussion at the 1975 NERC on the question of "What Was the Renaissance?"; Harvard University Archive, Myron P. Gilmore Papers, HUGFP 32.45, "Professional and Research Papers," Box 2, Folder

perhaps been overshadowed as a result of his chairmanship occurring between two of the longest-serving leaders in NERC's history.

David S. Berkowitz (1964-1983)

With Myron Gilmore's departure to Italy as Director of Harvard University's Villa I Tatti in 1964, the responsibility to lead NERC fell to David Berkowitz. Like Gilmore, Berkowitz obtained his Ph.D. in History at Harvard (1946); in that same year he became Chairman of Social Sciences at Emerson College. In 1948 he was one of thirteen original faculty at Brandeis University, where he taught history and political science for more than three decades. Berkowitz had substantial administrative experience from his post as Executive Officer of the Association of Colleges and Universities of New York, and as Director of University Planning and Assistant to the President at Brandeis; he was also deeply involved with Brandeis' library and particularly its Special Collections.⁶⁶

NERC did not have (and still does not have) any formal mechanism for choosing a leader. The typical method, as established by Leicester Bradner and his *ad hoc* committee, was for the outgoing executive to consult with various senior scholars within the organization in order to settle upon a worthy candidate. In a memorial note of 8 March 1983, Richard Douglas of MIT described how David Berkowitz took a different path to lead the New England Renaissance Conference in the early 1960s:

Many of us came to know David during his term as President of the New England Renaissance Conference. Although he held this office for twenty-one years, until the end of his life, he was never formally appointed, elected, or re-elected to it. He simply occupied it by the silent consensus of Renaissance scholars all over the

"New England Renaissance Conference," contains correspondence and programs for the 1973 and 1975 conferences.

⁶⁶ On Berkowitz's career, see Richard M. Douglas, "A Memorial Note on David Sandler Berkowitz" (8 March 1983), NERCA 1.25.11-B; see also the brief biography of him in the finding aid to David S. Berkowitz Papers, Robert D. Farber University Archives and Special Collections, Brandeis University Library; available online at <<http://lts.brandeis.edu/research/archives-speccoll/findingguides/archives/faculty/berkowitz.html>> [accessed 28 April 2013]. My thanks to Brandeis Special Collections Librarian Maggie McNeely for her assistance.

Northeast. And year after year, like obedient nomads, we followed David from meeting to meeting, a permanent tribal patriarch, universally loved and respected....⁶⁷

Berkowitz's tenure of two decades was equivalent to that of Leicester Bradner, and his impact upon NERC was equally important. Berkowitz maintained the tradition of an annual two-day conference that included both erudite talks and festive entertainment. He continued to promote a multidisciplinary approach to the Renaissance as had his predecessors. Yet he introduced important changes too, such as broadening the membership of NERC, moving beyond the Ivy League for conference hosts, and granting more freedom to the program chairs.

Together with nine of his faculty colleagues, Berkowitz organized the May 1963 conference at Brandeis. It featured an unusually ambitious program, with multiple exhibitions and a stronger emphasis upon exchange of ideas among conference participants.⁶⁸ The Brandeis conference opened on Friday afternoon with a symposium on early Italian Renaissance art, followed by an exhibition at the Rose Art Museum called "Major Masters of the Renaissance." Curated by Creighton Gilbert, that exhibition included fifteen paintings, thirty-nine prints, and three drawings from major artists of the period: Tintoretto, Lorenzo Lotto, Giorgione, Pieter Brueghel the Elder, Sebastiano del Piombo, Albrecht Dürer, Parmigianino, Giovan Battista Moroni, Hans Holbein the Elder, and Andrea Schiavone. The evening featured "Music and Dances of the Renaissance" with a particular focus on sixteenth-century Spanish compositions.⁶⁹ Berkowitz also organized two exhibitions at the Brandeis

⁶⁷ Richard M. Douglas, "A Memorial Note on David Sandler Berkowitz" (8 March 1983), NERCA 1.25.11-B. See also the 1966 Newsletter, as in n. 85 below, which observes that Berkowitz was elected by the 1965 annual conference, but clearly this election was *ex post facto*.

⁶⁸ Among David Berkowitz's papers at Brandeis are 8 folders that contain memos, letters, press releases, notes, budgets, biographies, and other miscellanea related to the 1963 conference. These provide an unusually detailed look at how Berkowitz organized this conference, and complement the full record preserved by Myron Gilmore for the 1961 conference. David S. Berkowitz Papers, Box 42, Folders 1-8, Brandeis University Library. The NERC Archive also contains a copy of the 1963 conference program and some ancillary materials.

⁶⁹ David S. Berkowitz Papers, Box 42, Folder 3, "Exhibits" includes a preliminary catalogue list of the artist, title of work, brief description, and loaning

Library. The first, drawing upon materials from Brandeis' own collection as well as loans from Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, featured illuminated manuscripts, incunabulae, and early Aldine editions in Hebrew, Latin, and Italian. This exhibition included a recently-discovered manuscript that contained early fragments of *Amadis de Gaul*; Berkowitz's correspondence shows that he worked closely with the donor and with the American consulate to ship the manuscript in a diplomatic pouch! The second exhibition included sixteenth-century armor and weapons from the Higgins Armory in Worcester. All three of the exhibitions included significant loans from other institutions, and required extensive advance planning.

The heart of the conference on Saturday included four panels on the broad theme of "New—and Old—Currents in the Renaissance," to which four scholars contributed thirty-minute papers on the history of medicine, humanism, art history, and philosophy, followed by the briefer observations of six "discussants." Berkowitz consciously changed the program in two ways: first, he adopted a theme to unite the papers, and secondly he introduced the practice of using commentators in order to spur discussion. He outlined these ideas three weeks prior to the conference in a letter to Leicester Bradner:

As an experiment we are asking two people to serve as discussants of the first three papers to be presented. I do not know whether it will work out well or not. The past conference discussions' level has, in my opinion, been lamentably low. This is, of course, understandable with a highly technical paper. In this case I felt that at least two members of the audience will have had the advantage of weighing the writer's words at leisure. The possibility of thoughtful and informed comment, I felt, would be very welcome to the writers.⁷⁰

Two of the discussants were Berkowitz's colleagues while the rest came from other New England schools. Berkowitz had originally hoped to lure Hans Baron or Federico Zeri, two of the most important names in

institutions. Folder 7, "Press Releases" includes additional information about the exhibition and about the Friday evening concert.

⁷⁰ Letter from David Berkowitz to Leicester Bradner (19 April 1963) David S. Berkowitz Papers, Box 42, Folder 2.

Renaissance Studies, but in the end he enticed Harry Berger (Yale), Raymond Klibansky (McGill), George Mora (Yale), and Richard Douglas (MIT) to speak.⁷¹ Berkowitz adapted a technique from Myron Gilmore when he hinted to at least one of the potential speakers that "Many of these papers have subsequently appeared in learned journals, most notably in *Studies of the Renaissance*."⁷² The most unusual topic was that of George Mora, a medical doctor who spoke on the figure of Johann Weyer (Wier) as a precursor of modern psychiatry on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the publication of *De Praestigiis Daemonum*.⁷³

As should be clear by now, this 1963 gathering was unusually ambitious in the range of activities offered to conference participants. The 1963 conference benefited greatly from Berkowitz's administrative experience. It may well have been this same administrative savvy that led him to include with the conference invitation a questionnaire to be completed by NERC members, about their respective interests, publications, and projects. The goal of the questionnaire was twofold: to update the mailing list and to assist planners of future conferences. In reflecting upon the conference to his colleague Sam Hunter several weeks later, Berkowitz observed that it had been "the most successful of the conferences held in

⁷¹ Minutes from David Berkowitz to Coordinating Committee (2 Nov. 1962), NERCA 1.5.1, listing scholars who might be available in the Boston area in 1963. The full list was: Hans Baron, Federico Zeri, Joseph Schulwath, Jacob Katz, Cecil Roth. David S. Berkowitz Papers, Brandeis University, Box 42, Folder 6, "Minutes of the Coordinating Committee."

⁷² Letter from David Berkowitz to Raymond Klibansky (9 Nov. 1962), David S. Berkowitz Papers, Brandeis University, Box 42, Folder 2, "Correspondence." In the same collection, in a letter of 27 April 1961, just after the conference had concluded at Harvard, Myron Gilmore had encouraged both Hanna Gray and Eugene Rice to publish their papers in *Renaissance Studies*; Gilmore observed that the editor, [Lisa?] Sheeber, "is always glad to get papers which were offered at these conferences." Gilmore added "As long as Mrs. [Phyllis Goodhart] Gordan continues to be an angel to the Society, I think that we can print almost as much that is good as we want or as we have available."

⁷³ Later that same day, Mora gave a similar address "for a meeting of the History of Medicine" in Boston; it was published as George Mora, "On the 400th anniversary of Johann Weyer's *De praestigiis daemonum*--Its significance for today's psychiatry," *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, 120 (1963): 417-428. Berkowitz's correspondence (Box 42, Folder 2) shows repeated negotiations to ensure that Mora could speak at both events on the same day. The original copy of Mora's talk to NERC remains in David Berkowitz's papers, Box 42, Folder 4.

the last dozen years."⁷⁴ Nevertheless, he was not eager to do it again, and indeed the conference did not return to Brandeis for thirty years.⁷⁵

Subsequent conferences at Yale (1965), MIT (1966), Brown (1967), Vassar (1968), and University of Rhode Island (1969) followed the traditional pattern of a two-day, four-paper conference with an evening concert or exhibition at a local museum. The speakers included many of the leading scholars of the day: H. W. Janson, Roland Bainton, Lewis Lockwood, Ronald Witt, Anthony Molho, Marvin Becker, Raymond de Roover, and Charles Trinkaus. Most of these speakers were local to New England, but some traveled considerable distances to participate. Italian topics—especially history, humanism, and art—remained the most common, but other regions of Europe received substantial coverage as well. With the exception of the 1963 gathering at Brandeis, none of the conferences in the 1960s offered a comprehensive theme to bring all papers together; this practice would emerge only in the 1980s and later.

What of the other academic societies founded to promote Renaissance Studies during the 1950s and 1960s? To what extent did their mission, hierarchy, size, hosts, or membership parallel that of NERC?

The South-Central Renaissance Conference (SCRC) was the first regional association to follow NERC; the SCRC initially met in 1952 as an interdisciplinary association of Renaissance scholars whose membership was largely concentrated across the southeastern United States. No documentation of the first meeting is extant, but typescript minutes of the SCRC Executive Committee meeting at Austin, Texas were recorded in April 1953.⁷⁶ Under the leadership of Albert Howard Carter of the

⁷⁴ Letter from David Berkowitz to Sam Hunter (20 May 1963), David S. Berkowitz Papers, Box 42, Folder 2. Hunter was the director of the Poses Institute of Fine Arts, and had collaborated in the preparation of the symposium and the art exhibition.

⁷⁵ Letter from David Berkowitz to Paul Brainard (15 May 1963), David S. Berkowitz Papers, Box 42, Folder 2: "I don't ever want to do another conference...." Brainard was the chair of the Brandeis Music Department, and had collaborated in the Friday evening program of music and dance. NERC returned to Brandeis in 1993 and again in 2013.

⁷⁶ South-Central Renaissance Conference Archives, at <<http://www.scrc.us.com/archives.shtml>> [accessed 30 March 2014]; for the years beginning in 1953, all of the minutes are posted; and beginning in 1999, all of the conference programs, abstracts, and some photos are posted. The minutes are recorded in typescript in some years, and in manuscript in other years.

University of Arkansas, the committee approved a constitution, elected by acclamation a slate of new officers, and planned the next year's meeting at the University of Arkansas. In Fayetteville the following year, the minutes of May 1954 acknowledge the creation of the RSA in New York, and the decision of the SCRC to elect a pair of representatives to serve on the RSA Advisory Council.⁷⁷ The minutes in this and following years largely document routine business, such as acceptance of the prior year's minutes, selection of a nominating committee, approval of constitutional amendments, and the like. Subsequent meetings in this decade occurred at Tulane University (Nov. 1954), UC Berkeley (1955), Louisiana State University (1956), University of Mississippi (1957), Texas Christian University (1958), and Rice University (1959).⁷⁸ William Peery was the first President of the SCRC, and Willis H. Bowem faithfully recorded the minutes as Secretary. The minutes document the regular turnover of the SCRC officers each year as new members moved onto the Board.

During the 1960s the SCRC continued to meet every year, with more than half of those meetings occurring in the state of Texas. The 1963 program (at the University of Houston) and that of 1965 (at Texas A&M) demonstrate that about a dozen papers were offered at each conference, as well as a dinner with a lecture and entertainment. The topics were similar to those proposed at NERC, with a preponderance of Italian history and art, as well as English theater and literature.⁷⁹ The conferences always lasted two days, and were occasionally held in conjunction with the meetings of the Modern Language Association, the Southern Humanities Conference, or even (as in 1964 in Austin) with a Renaissance Faire. The 1964 minutes, from a meeting at UT-Austin, are the first to include a budget, and show that membership dues collected as of April 1964 totaled \$92, with total disbursements of \$58.82. It is worth noting also the report of Robert G. Collmer, SCRC representative to the

⁷⁷ SCRC Archives, at: <http://www.scrs.us.com/archives/minutes/minutes1954_may_exec.pdf>

⁷⁸ SCRC Archives, at <<http://www.scrs.us.com/archives.shtml>> [accessed 30 March 2014]. Berkeley is clearly an anomaly on this list; it was decided in 1954 that no meeting would be planned for Spring 1955, and the minutes of March 1955 suggest that the "meeting" of the Executive Committee took place by post, as President Howard Carter was on leave in CA. See: <<http://www.scrs.us.com/archives/minutes/minutes1955.pdf>> Rice University was known as The Rice Institute in 1958.

⁷⁹ There are only transcriptions of these two programs, not the originals.

Advisory Council of the RSA, who reported his impression after the Jan. 1964 meeting at Columbia University that "the national meeting does not seem to know what it is doing."⁸⁰

Almost simultaneously with the foundation of the SCRC in the South, the Pacific Northwest Renaissance Conference (PNRS) was organized in 1956 by historian Quirinus Breen (University of Oregon), classicist Paul Pascal (University of Washington), and literary scholar G. P. V. Akrigg (University of British Columbia). The program of the following year's conference, in April 1957 at the University of Washington, shows that the PNRS met jointly with the local chapters of the American Musicological Society and of the Classical Association.⁸¹ Seventeen papers and two plenary lectures confirm an auspicious start for this fledgling organization. The PNRS continued to meet annually, at the University of British Columbia (1958), Gonzaga University (1959), the University of Oregon (1960), the University of Washington (1961), Western Washington State College (1963), University of Oregon again (1964), Central Washington State College (1965), University of Victoria (1966), Washington State University (1967), the University of Alberta (1968), and Lewis & Clark College (1969). Paul Oskar Kristeller was to have spoken at the 1960 meeting but an automobile accident prevented his attendance.

One unique feature of the PNRS is its distinctly bi-national character; beginning in 1971, the annual meeting formally alternated between the USA and Canada, just as the presidency also had to alternate between an American and a Canadian scholar. The PNRS struggled in its early years with the problem of hosting the conference at schools remote from a major airport, with resultant declines in attendance. In reflecting upon the history of the PNRS and the RSA, Jean MacIntyre and Paul Budra have written:

In the early years of both societies, distance, cost, and surface travel militated against any close association. When the PNRC began, the Pacific Northwest was remote and inaccessible to most of North America. This remoteness, along with the easy

⁸⁰ See SCRC Archives, at: <http://www.scrs.us.com/archives/minutes/minutes1964_exec.pdf>

⁸¹ Here I am indebted to the history of the PNRS compiled by Jean MacIntyre and Paul Budra (see n. 4, above).

communication between British Columbia and the American states to the south, has meant that the PNRC has always been an international association....As air travel has grown cheaper and more convenient, the isolation of the region from scholars from east of the Cascades and the Rockies has almost disappeared, and it is usual to find at least one or two presenters from as far east as Halifax and Boston on every PNRC programme.⁸²

Also in the late 1950s, the Renaissance Conference of Southern California (RCSC) was formed as a "scholarly association dedicated to the advancement of learning in Renaissance Studies."⁸³ It has always been centered in the Los Angeles Basin, anchored by UCLA and USC as well as the plethora of other colleges and universities in that area. Similar to NERC, SCRC, and PNRS, the RCSC has consciously promoted an interdisciplinary approach to Renaissance Studies, and has for decades been an affiliate of the Renaissance Society of America. Also similar to NERC, the RCSC has maintained a "minimalist" approach by focusing on an annual conference but eschewing a journal and membership dues. Unlike its sister societies, however, the RCSC does not typically migrate from one university host to another; instead, it has been able to meet regularly at the Huntington Library in San Marino, CA, a locale which offers not only exceptional natural beauty but also a fine collection of Renaissance books and manuscripts. The RCSC also developed a different system of leadership than NERC. The Southern California Conference has a ladder of officers, ranging from Treasurer to Second Vice-President to Vice-President to President; each consists of a one-year term and one moves up the hierarchy over the course of four years. Such a system offers the benefits and disadvantages of frequent turnover at the top; it is quite different than the long-serving presidents that have characterized NERC.

The isolation of Western scholars may also have prompted, at least in part, the formation of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance

⁸² See <<http://www.pnrs.org/about.html>> [accessed 30 March 2014].

⁸³ See <<http://rcsconline.org/about-us.html>> [accessed 31 March 2014]. To the best of my knowledge, no archive exists for the RCSC; I am grateful to current President Martine Van Elk (CSU-Long Beach) for this information.

Association (RMRRRA) in 1968.⁸⁴ The RMRRRA had its inaugural meeting at the University of Denver under the leadership of its first President, historian Allen D. Breck, with an Advisory Board that consisted of Charles P. Carlson, Boyd H. Hill, Harry Rosenberg, and Edith C. Tatnall. Its original intention was to be an informal group, rather than an official society, whose purpose was to provide a gathering-place to promote "sharing of knowledge and experiences." The initial board was composed entirely of historians, and the association has met annually since 1968, in cities both large (e.g., Denver, Salt Lake City) and small (e.g., Pocatello, Idaho), but always "within sight of the Rocky Mountains." More recently it has established a journal *Quidditas*, a Facebook page, a Doodle poll, and scholarship and ride-sharing opportunities for younger scholars who wish to attend the conference.

Returning to NERC, David Berkowitz introduced a short-lived "Occasional Newsletter" in the mid-1960s with the goal of providing updates to conference members. In contrast to the memos and letters authored by Berkowitz, the two newsletters are full of amusing anecdotes, jokes, and clever word plays. For example, in summarizing the 1965 conference at Yale, Berkowitz wrote "one veteran conference-goer was heard to murmur that the new Beinecke rare book library made an even more impressive cocktail lounge than the (then new) Brandeis art gallery"; and in announcing the 1967 conference at Brown University, Berkowitz referred to it as a "return to the womb," with *pater academicus* Leicester Bradner serving as mid-wife.⁸⁵ A declaration that the University of Rhode Island would serve as host in 1969 was announced as follows:

Giving validity (and another first) to its motto "Join NERC and see New England first," we take great pride, etc. in announcing that our 1969 host will be the University of Rhode Island. The University impartially holds up its lamp of learning for those who do and those

⁸⁴ For information on the RMRRRA, I am grateful to Kristin Bezio (Univ. of Richmond), who with assistance from Ginger Smoak compiled a four-page history of the RMRRRA for the meeting at the RSA in 2014. The RMRRRA website, currently at <http://rowdy.msudenver.edu/~tayljeff/RMMRA/Index.html> [accessed 31 March 2014], includes links to newsletters dating back to 1996 but no additional information about the formative years.

⁸⁵ An Occasional Newsletter of the New England Renaissance Conference, No. 1 (March 1966), NERCA 1.7.1, 1 [hereafter "1966 Newsletter"].

who do not require alcoholic stimulation as a prelude to learning, eating, or sleeping. But Kingston itself is one of those interesting survivals of the "noble experiment," a "dry town." However, there is no need to fortify oneself in advance for the next two years; an ingenious dean knows how to solve the problem of our presence with all due regard for the niceties of obedience to the law.⁸⁶

The newsletters also included regular pleas from Berkowitz to his colleagues to consider hosting NERC in a future year, and ruminations about how the mailing list each year vastly exceeded the actual turnout. In addition, Berkowitz reminded his readers that NERC had survived, and even prospered, without the services of a treasurer or a secretary, but instead relied upon each program's chairman: "sometimes self-designated and sometimes coerced, he (or she) may be accurately characterized as one with enough nerve, confidence, influence or skill to convince a college administration to play host to our conference."⁸⁷ Berkowitz also poked fun at his own nebulous role in a short piece entitled "The Invisible Organization; or, how to be a fifth wheel." He characterized himself as "a functionary, variously described as a president, a general secretary, or a permanent chairman, apparently designated to serve 'without limit of time'. He is described as 'a sort of secretary' charged with the task 'to keep it alive' by seeing to it that an annual conference [is] in actuality held, as it should be every year."⁸⁸

On a more serious note, Berkowitz made clear to members of his own program committee for the 1963 conference that faculty from the host institution were not expected to participate as principal speakers, although they were welcome to serve in secondary roles (i.e., chairs or discussants).⁸⁹ He repeated this injunction in a 1974 letter, noting that "Program participants are recruited from all over the country; the only rule I enforce is that the program chairman avoid invitations to local, i.e.

⁸⁶ An Occasional Newsletter of the New England Renaissance Conference, No. 2 (February 1967), NERCA 1.7.2, 1 [hereafter "1967 Newsletter"].

⁸⁷ 1966 Newsletter, NERCA 1.7.1, 1.

⁸⁸ 1966 Newsletter, NERCA 1.7.1, 1.

⁸⁹ Memo from David Berkowitz to "Messrs. [Edgar] Johnson, [James] Cunningham, [James] Duffy . . .," [members of the Program Committee for the 1963 conference at Brandeis] (23 May 1962) NERCA 1.5.1, 1; this is in the NERC Archive, and also in Box 42, Folder 1, David S. Berkowitz Papers, Brandeis Special Collections.

campus, talent."⁹⁰ He elaborated a bit further on this idea in another letter to Yale President A. Bartlett Giamatti, noting that NERC enforced an "absolute ban on 'local' talent" so that young program chairs could say no to their senior colleagues.⁹¹

In a letter to John Tedeschi early in 1974, Berkowitz elaborated his views on NERC's informal organizational structure. Coming almost exactly at the midpoint of Berkowitz's administration, the letter serves both as a description of past practice and as a guide to future policy. Berkowitz pointed out that the New England Renaissance Conference "is less formal than elsewhere; it has only one permanent officer and in succession they have been Leicester Bradner, Myron Gilmore, and myself." Berkowitz explained that the leader of NERC was responsible "to provide for continuity of the annual meetings by recruiting and encouraging local institutions." Upon receipt of a formal invitation, he continued, "the President's function is discharged and full responsibility for the organization and conduct of the program devolves on the local program chairman."⁹² Berkowitz underscored this latter point by emphasizing yet again that "The local program chairman has a free hand in fashioning both the program and the nature of the organization he or she thinks necessary for the occasion." Berkowitz's correspondence during the 1970s with various program chairs provides additional evidence of his willingness to let the chairs make virtually all of the decisions about the shape and scope of the conference program.⁹³

Berkowitz's letter to Tedeschi also offers rough estimates about attendance, cost, and program quality. He noted that the number of participants varied widely, running from a minimum of 60 to a maximum of

⁹⁰ Letter from David Berkowitz to John Tedeschi (15 Jan. 1974), NERCA 1.9.1, 1. See the following two paragraphs for further explanation of this correspondence with Tedeschi.

⁹¹ Letter from David Berkowitz to A. Bartlett Giamatti (2 Oct. 1979), NERCA 1.15.1.

⁹² Letter from David Berkowitz to John Tedeschi (15 Jan. 1974), NERCA 1.9.1, 1. In this letter Berkowitz sometimes uses the term "President" although elsewhere in his correspondence and memos he is careful to avoid using this term, preferring "coordinator" or "permanent officer." Only with the appointment of Samuel Y. Edgerton in 1995 did the title of "President" come into regular usage, as discussed below.

⁹³ For example, correspondence between Berkowitz and Karen F. Wiley who organized the 1976 conference at University of Vermont, NERCA 1.11.1-4; or between Berkowitz and Elizabeth H. Hageman who organized the 1974 conference at UNH, NERCA 1.9.2.

200. Interestingly, he commented that "in recent years there has been an extraordinary out-migration of Renaissance scholars from New England," which reflects the growth of state universities in the rest of the United States, and naturally is linked to the growth of Renaissance societies elsewhere in the nation too. Berkowitz was astute enough to recognize that other factors influenced NERC attendance too; he cited weather, population density of academics, transportation, and "competing attractions" among other factors. Budgets, too, varied significantly from a low of \$500 to over \$20,000, according to Berkowitz. Regardless of this variability, Berkowitz boasted, "the quality of the programs are uniformly high." It is difficult to test the veracity of Berkowitz's assertion about program quality, but certainly many of the speakers were well-known in the field. Perhaps the most illuminating excerpt from Berkowitz's letter to Tedeschi comes in the final paragraph, in which Berkowitz offers an overview of NERC. Here he lauded the lack of bureaucracy, the conscious efforts to mix academic disciplines, and the enthusiasm of the membership. He wrote "The New England Renaissance Conference remains staunchly [*sic*] informal, staunchly interdisciplinary, and vigorous. Although efforts have been made from time to time to see if the membership has any interest in changing the format, no such interest has yet appeared.... The only 'business' [that] our members have is to enjoy the varied program which our two-day sessions offer."⁹⁴

The conferences in the 1970s continued to follow the time-honored tradition of the previous three decades. Every conference followed the two-day format of panel sessions, a Renaissance concert or stage performance, and a formal dinner on Friday evening. Special events, such as the 500th anniversary of Michelangelo's birth in 1975, were commemorated with exhibitions or lectures. Dartmouth (1970) was the only Ivy League school to host, followed by Wheaton College (1971), UMass Amherst (1972), Southeastern Massachusetts University [today UMass Dartmouth] (1973), University of New Hampshire (1974), Boston University (1975), University of Vermont (1976), Rhode Island College (1977), Mount Holyoke College (1978), and Williams College (1979). It is worth noting the prevalence of "colleges" as opposed to "universities" in this list, which is yet one more sign of the move away from the major research universities.

⁹⁴ Letter from David Berkowitz to John Tedeschi (15 Jan. 1974), NERCA 1.9.1, 1-2.

Nearly all of these conferences appear to have run smoothly and without incident. Berkowitz wrote, and received, numerous letters of effusive praise and heartfelt thanks to (and from) program chairs, deans, and presidents. One notable exception, however, was the October 1977 conference at Rhode Island College. Preliminary letters between Berkowitz, program chair and art history professor Ronald Steinberg, and Dean Noel Richards in 1974-75, suggested good will and advance planning on all sides.⁹⁵ Yet angry words and accusations of bad faith (or worse) flew in the wake of the conference. On 31 October 1975, just two days after the conference, Rhode Island College professor of English Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz lambasted Berkowitz for his failure to adequately publicize the conference:

The lack of publicity that burdens NERC from my own personal experience reached the zenith of absurdity in its Rhode Island College meeting when the Renaissance faculty of Rhode Island College—including some of the NERC committee members—were uninformed of both the dates and the papers of the conference until the week of the conference. In spite of this silence, you tell me 100 people attended Friday's meeting, which seems to testify to the truth of Renaissance belief in the beneficence of God's Providence....The personal insult to scholars and teachers, ignored by an important scholarly organization, should not however be underestimated, even if it is borne in dignified silence.⁹⁶

Lenz's complaint seems odd in several ways. First, if the estimate of one hundred participants is to be believed, clearly attendance had not suffered too dramatically.⁹⁷ Secondly, although Lenz was on the program committee, it appears that she herself did not attend the opening day of the conference. Third, all other archival sources indicate that David

⁹⁵ Letter from Ronald M. Steinberg to David Berkowitz (4 Dec. 1975), NERCA 1.12.1; Letter from David Berkowitz to Ronald M. Steinberg (19 Dec. 1975), NERCA 1.12.2; Letter from Noel Richards to David Berkowitz (17 Feb. 1975), NERCA 1.12.3; Letter from David Berkowitz to Noel Richards (21 Feb. 1975), NERCA 1.12.4.

⁹⁶ Letter from Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz to David Berkowitz (31 Oct. 1977), NERCA 1,16.9.

⁹⁷ But cf. Steinberg's observation about low attendance at Friday's dinner below (n. 101).

Berkowitz was a conscientious and meticulous administrator, who was unlikely to misjudge the size of the audience so dramatically. Lastly, her reference to "dignified silence" implies that nobody else had come forward to complain about the lack of notification. To her credit, Lenz offered to take on the herculean task of updating the NERC mailing list and of making it available to future host institutions.

Three weeks later Lenz received a letter from John Lemly at Mount Holyoke College, coordinator of the following year's NERC. Lemly acknowledged that he had heard from another scholar "of your talk and of the various disasters which beset the Rhode Island College meeting."⁹⁸ Lemly thanked Lenz for her "public-spirited offer" to compile a mailing list, and referred obliquely to "a most inadequate [mailing] list" prepared by program chair Ronald Steinberg at Rhode Island College. The next day Lemly informed Berkowitz of his intention to "send announcements to 5-6 relevant departments at 100-150 New England and New York colleges and universities," as well as a notice to two dozen journals.⁹⁹ Six months later Steinberg himself sent a hand-written letter to David Berkowitz, together with a copy of the mailing list. Steinberg claimed that "the finished one was never re-typed or copied, and has been lost."¹⁰⁰ Steinberg went on to describe more serious conflicts with his university's administration that stemmed from the NERC meeting in the fall. Steinberg's outrage is palpable, but his account does imply that attendance at the conference was in fact much lower than expected. According to Steinberg, university administrators

claim over \$800 is owed them by the NERC (or the RSA) for dinner the night of the conference. They prepared for 150 persons (!) & only c. 35 were there. I believe they have even billed RSA! They are demanding I pay them if RSA doesn't. And there is no reason, as I've told them, for RSA to do so. It is bizarre! I have had to engage an

⁹⁸ Letter from John Lemly to Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz (21 Nov. 1977), NERCA 1.13.1-B. Note, however, that Lenz does not appear in the conference program as one of the speakers or respondents. Lemly's report of this incident came from English professor Andrea Sununu.

⁹⁹ Letter from John Lemly to David Berkowitz (22 Nov. 1977), NERCA 1.13.1-A. Clearly Lemly wanted the 1978 conference to be well-publicized.

¹⁰⁰ Letter from Ronald Steinberg to David Berkowitz (15 Mar. 1978), NERCA 1.12.5.

attorney for the administration is claiming they can take the money from my pay (which, according to my attorney, is not likely).¹⁰¹

No replies from David Berkowitz to Steinberg or to Lenz are extant in the NERC files or in his papers at Brandeis University, so we cannot speculate as to Berkowitz's position on these issues. Perhaps the issue simply represents petty complaints by a sole aggrieved faculty member or a penny-pinching administration. It is certainly true that the infamous NERC mailing list caused no end of headaches for Berkowitz and for individual program chairs who had to update it.¹⁰² It is also true that at least two other letters in the NERC files complain of being ignored or dropped from the NERC mailing list under Berkowitz's supervision.¹⁰³ On the other hand, these are isolated complaints, and dwarfed by dozens of positive statements.

Returning to a broader perspective across two decades of NERC, from 1963 to 1983, one of David Berkowitz's most important accomplishments for NERC was to broaden the membership of the organization. Richard Douglas noted this legacy in his memorial statement about Berkowitz:

From New Haven or New London, to Hanover or Burlington,
David held us together for over two decades, turning what started

¹⁰¹ Letter from Ronald Steinberg to David Berkowitz (15 Mar. 1978), NERCA 1.12.5.

¹⁰² Problems with the mailing list is a perennial complaint in the correspondence; as one example among many, see the letter from Karen W. Sandler to David Berkowitz (30 June 1976), NERCA 1.11.3-A: "I tried to call you today to ask for your help in straightening out the mailing list. Quite frankly, when we finally received it, it was a mess! [emphasis in the original] I doubt that anything had been done on it all year and we had to start from scratch to update it." The usual practice was for the NERC President to pass the mailing list of 300-500 names and addresses from one program chair to the next. Each year the Program Chair and the President would (theoretically) update the list to reflect actual attendance, recent deaths, and the like. About a dozen copies of the mailing list are extant in the NERC Archive for different years of the conference.

¹⁰³ Letter from Pardon E. Tillinghast (Middlebury College) to RSA, (1 Dec. 1971), NERCA 1.16.7; and the reply from Miss M.A. Riley to Pardon Tillinghast (20 Dec. 1971), NERCA 1.16.7, with copy to Berkowitz. See also the spirited reply of David Berkowitz to Barbara Hardy (SUNY Oswego) (10 Feb. 1975) NERCA 1.10.5, re: her complaint about the mailing list and about regional dues.

out as an exclusive group of several dozen elders into an open society where all serious scholars—young ones and emeriti alike—were made to feel welcome.¹⁰⁴

Six years later, in a letter to Edward Cranz that accompanied a thick folder of Berkowitz's correspondence as president of NERC, Douglas restated his view on Berkowitz's legacy:

One of his achievements as President was to open up the membership beyond the tight little band of two dozen who represented Bradner's ideal. I remember one slightly contentious Saturday evening when David confronted Leicester about his exclusive canons for membership. Leicester winced at the idea of inviting clergy from Holy Cross or assistant professors from Rhode Island. But none of this bothered David, who quietly undertook to compile a vastly enlarged mailing list.¹⁰⁵

In his brief history of NERC, Cranz agreed, writing that "under [Berkowitz's] aegis the conference was an open society where any serious scholar was welcome. The conference also became more of an all-New England affair than it had been."¹⁰⁶ As noted previously, the early dominance of the Ivy League disappeared during the 1960s and 1970s, precisely the period when David Berkowitz served as NERC's executive. Berkowitz's efforts to broaden the membership of NERC were surely inspired by a volume that he published early in his administrative career entitled *Inequality of Opportunity in Higher Education*, which was a

¹⁰⁴ Richard M. Douglas, "A Memorial Note on David Sandler Berkowitz" (8 Mar. 1983), NERCA 1.25.11-B. Douglas never occupied a leadership role of NERC but his name appears frequently in the correspondence of the organization, and he was recognized by Edward Cranz, "Fifty Years," 757 "for the role he played in guiding the consultations that provided successors to the nameless post created by Leicester Bradner..." A letter of 17 Sept. 1985 from Samuel Edgerton to Richard Douglas, NERCA 1.19.1, written just after Edgerton had been nominated as president of NERC, claims that Douglas really should have been the one to receive this honor.

¹⁰⁵ Letter from Richard M. Douglas to F. Edward Cranz (28 Feb. 1989), NERCA 1.25.11-A.

¹⁰⁶ Cranz, "Fifty Years," 758.

significant forerunner to the first Fair Education Practices Act. Of course Berkowitz was writing about the study of barriers to college enrollment of minorities, not about elite academic societies comprised of professors, but the push for inclusiveness and greater opportunity is evident in both examples.

Ill health forced David Berkowitz to step away from his duties as the leader of NERC in 1983, and he died shortly thereafter.¹⁰⁷ Together with Leicester Bradner, he retains the distinction of being NERC's longest-serving executive. Berkowitz led the transformation of NERC from an elite group of Ivy League professors to a broader professional society that included scholars at all levels and from all types of institutions across New England.

Jane Ruby (1983-85)

The NERC membership seemed at a loss after the death of their beloved long-time leader in March 1983. No conference was held that year. Five months after Berkowitz's passing, Richard Douglas wrote to Edward Cranz that a successor must be found to follow David Berkowitz as president of NERC. However, wrote Douglas, "I feel terribly awkward about taking any kind of initiative in this melancholy matter and would prefer simply to ignore it." He continued, "It is especially delicate in an organization which has insistently denied that it has a material existence in the first place. But at a moment like this one can hear David say, with a bit of impatience, 'You all know what has to be done. Consult, get a consensus of the elders, and announce the result in a recommendation to the Conference in October.'"¹⁰⁸ Although there are occasional references to a nominating committee prior to 1983, including Bradner's *ad hoc* committee and a reference to one in Berkowitz's own letter to John Tedeschi, there is little indication that any such formal body ever existed. Instead, private consultation among the senior members of NERC was the standard practice for choosing a new leader. It was not by accident

¹⁰⁷ See Richard M. Douglas, "A Memorial Note on David Sandler Berkowitz" (8 Mar. 1983), NERCA 1.25-11-B, for more on Berkowitz's leadership of NERC, and on the circumstances of his death.

¹⁰⁸ Letter from Richard Douglas to Edward Cranz (8 Aug. 1983), NERCA 1.17-1-B.

that one of the senior members involved in the search for a successor to David Berkowitz referred to himself, with tongue firmly in cheek, as a member of the "college of cardinals" who participated in the "investiture" of a new leader for NERC, and who closed his letter by exclaiming "Habeamus Papam!"¹⁰⁹ Richard Douglas's letter of 8 August 1983 made clear that both the initial brainstorming and the final selection of a new executive were to be handled by "a small number of NERC regulars... who have extended association with the Conference."¹¹⁰ The result of this rump parliament was the first woman leader in the history of NERC: Jane Ruby, a professor of history at Wheaton College, who was proclaimed "popess" in the fall of 1983.¹¹¹

Jane Ruby taught medieval and Renaissance history at Wheaton College for twenty-four years (1954–1978), and served the last two years as Provost. A specialist in fourteenth-century political thought and concepts of nature, she (like her predecessors) earned a degree from Harvard.¹¹² In describing the reasons for her selection, Richard Douglas wrote that "the consensus points very clearly to Jane Ruby—for her knowledge of the Conference and her long standing commitment to it, for her acquaintance with its members and traditions, for her professional qualifications and her personal qualities."¹¹³

Ruby had organized a NERC conference at Wheaton in October 1971 that included two papers on the Fifth Lateran Council, two papers on the theme of "Ideas Into Poetry," and one paper on Baroque Portraiture, as well as the performance of a Hans Sachs pro-Lutheran Carnival play of 1551, "How to Hatch Calves" (*Das Kälberbrüten*).¹¹⁴ In a letter from Ruby to Berkowitz a few days after the 1971 conference, Ruby observed that

¹⁰⁹ Letter from Samuel Edgerton to Richard Douglas (13 Sept. 1983), NERCA 1.17.2. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹⁰ Letter from Richard Douglas to Edward Cranz (8 Aug. 1983), NERCA 1.1.17.1-B.

¹¹¹ Letter from Samuel Edgerton to Richard Douglas (13 Sept. 1983), NERCA 1.17.1-B. Edgerton uses the term "popess."

¹¹² See Jane Ruby's obituary in *The Boston Globe*, 19 Feb. 1992. Technically, the degree was awarded by Radcliffe.

¹¹³ Letter from Richard Douglas to Edward Cranz (8 Aug. 1983), NERCA 1.17.1-B.

¹¹⁴ No conference program is extant, but a brief notice appeared in *Renaissance Quarterly*, 24 (1971): 429.

the conference had gone very well, with "good attendance" and enthusiastic reception by the audience. The cheery tone of the letter suggests a familiarity with Berkowitz (who was often quite formal in his correspondence) and with NERC, as Ruby offered suggestions about future conference hosts, observations on editing the mailing list, and condolences on Berkowitz's health.¹¹⁵ Ruby also gave a paper at the 1973 conference that examined the use of the term "law" in scientific writing from Roger Bacon to Issac Newton.

The conferences held under Ruby's aegis included one at Wellesley (April 1984), another at Wheaton (November 1984), and a third at UMass Amherst (1985). The program at Wellesley featured three sessions with an almost entirely Italian focus, including papers by Samuel K. Cohn, Werner Gundersheimer, and Wendy Stedman Sheard, as well as a performance on Wellesley's new Late Renaissance organ built by Charles Fisk. It was very unusual to have two conferences in the same calendar year, as happened in 1984, but presumably this was an effort to make up for the missed conference during the prior year. The conference at Wheaton, held 2-3 November 1984, was brief: two papers on Friday afternoon and three more on Saturday morning, including yet another paper by Paul Oskar Kristeller, this time on the university curriculum in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy. Ruby commented in a letter to Samuel Edgerton that she would have liked to include more thematic sessions but "gave up the idea for the Wheaton meeting only because the time for preparation was unusually brief, from late spring to fall."¹¹⁶ No extant program survives for the 1985 conference at UMass Amherst, which was organized by Daniel Martin, but we can glean something from the appreciative letter sent by Jane Ruby in her last act as president of NERC: "We owe you many thanks for the impressive conference you staged at the University this past weekend—in fact a combination of the traditional New England conference with an international conference! Praiseworthy were its variety and its quality, and also the fine attendance. Like others, I appreciated not only the papers, but also the handsomely illustrated program and the delightful entertainment at dinner."¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Letter from Jane Ruby to David Berkowitz (30 Oct. 1971), NERCA 1.16.6.

¹¹⁶ Letter from Jane Ruby to Samuel Edgerton (24 Sept. 1985), NERCA 1.19.2-A.

¹¹⁷ Letter from Jane Ruby to Daniel Martin (4 Nov. 1985), NERCA 1.19-4-B. The program included at least one session on Boccaccio, chaired by Angelo Mazzocco:

It is difficult to gauge the impact of Jane Ruby upon NERC. Few examples of her correspondence survive, and she served only a brief three years before stepping down. In addition to the three conferences that occurred on her watch, she was involved, albeit indirectly, in some discussions about the location of the 1989 conference celebrating NERC's fiftieth anniversary.¹¹⁸ She provided some counsel to her successor, Samuel Edgerton, about the formation of a "more structured" advisory council, consisting of "some able younger scholars on the Conference mailing list who might ponder the future of the Conference with you."¹¹⁹ It is tempting to say that she broke the glass ceiling of an otherwise male-dominated cabal of NERC leadership. Certainly it is true that the 1980s witnessed important gains by female academics but it is impossible to link such advances to Jane Ruby's presidency of NERC, nor can we point to this isolated example as in any way representative of broader changes within the academy.

Samuel Y. Edgerton (1985–1990)

During the summer of 1985 Jane Ruby stepped down, and once again the elders of NERC conferred to appoint a successor. They selected Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., an art historian from Williams College whose research interests began in Medieval and Renaissance Europe and later shifted to the arts of pre- and post-conquest America. Edgerton earned four degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, including the Ph.D. in 1965; he taught art history at Boston University for sixteen years (1964–1980) before moving to Williams College for twenty-seven years as the Amos Lawrence Professor of Art and director of the Graduate Program there (1980–2007).¹²⁰ Edgerton was deeply familiar with the New England Renaissance Conference, having organized the October 1975 conference

"Boccaccio Newsletter," at <<http://www.umass.edu/italian/ABA/newsletters/1985-2.pdf>> [accessed 30 April 2013], 4.

¹¹⁸ See n. 27 above.

¹¹⁹ Letter from Jane Ruby to Samuel Edgerton (24 Sept. 1985), NERCA 1.19.2-A.

¹²⁰ The American Historical Association cited his innovative and interdisciplinary work on the importance of linear perspective; he also won a Guggenheim Fellowship and was a fellow at Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study. See his Emeritus Citation from Williams College: <http://archives.williams.edu/williamshistory/commencement/2007/edgerton_cit.php> [accessed 30 April 2013], which

at Boston University, and more recently having participated in the elevation of Jane Ruby as president of NERC.

In responding to the news of his election as the leader of NERC, Edgerton described it as a "complete surprise" which left him "overwhelmed and slightly unsure as to how [to] respond."¹²¹ He expressed concern about what he called "the means of my elevation," by which he clearly meant the informal way in which he had been selected. He specified that "While I always approved of this method regarding prior presidents, I am less secure when it is applied to me. Somehow I think I won't be as unambiguously acceptable as Myron [Gilmore] or David [Berkowitz] or Jane [Ruby] or even you, Dick [Douglas], whom I think deserves this honor more than anyone else." Despite his trepidation, Edgerton agreed to serve, and promised to outline "a few principles I have been cogitating."¹²²

Within a week Jane Ruby had sent him a congratulatory letter and a list of eleven "able younger scholars" who could serve on an advisory committee.¹²³ Ruby noted that she and her (unnamed) colleagues had drawn up the list rapidly at the end of a long session devoted primarily to the presidency of NERC, and that it seemed to her flawed because it contained too many names from Wellesley and Brown. The list was "merely suggestive," she wrote, and he should feel free to add other names to it. She also sent Edgerton a mailing list of three hundred scholars, including their affiliation and (where known) their approximate age. Three weeks later Ruby reminded Edgerton of the importance of selecting his advisory committee in a prompt manner.¹²⁴ He responded immediately that he believed a committee of about five persons would be optimal. Although Edgerton may indeed have relied upon an inner circle of

notes his pre-academic pursuits as a meat salesman and as a wrestling opponent of Donald Rumsfeld(!), as well as later academic accomplishments.

¹²¹ Letter from Samuel Edgerton to Jane Ruby and Richard Douglas (17 Sept. 1985), NERCA 1.19.1.

¹²² Letter from Samuel Edgerton to Jane Ruby and Richard Douglas (17 Sept. 1985), NERCA 1.19.1.

¹²³ Letter from Jane Ruby to Samuel Edgerton (24 Sept. 1985), NERCA 1.19.2-A.

¹²⁴ Letter from Jane Ruby to Samuel Edgerton (4 Nov. 1985), NERCA 1.19.4-A: "I hope you will forgive me for observing also that I think it would be to the good if you could find time to select your advisory committee fairly soon. There is a certain momentum and interest created by the annual meeting. With that, I subside—for good. I shall, of course, be happy to help in any way I can; but henceforth our fate is in your hands!"

advisors, there is no extant evidence of a formal advisory group under his presidency.

Edgerton immediately began to organize the next year's conference; in keeping with the practice of his predecessors Bradner, Gilmore, and Ruby, he hosted it at his own institution. However, Edgerton introduced a twist by choosing a theme of "Three Current Controversies in Renaissance Studies." As he explained it to the members of NERC six months prior the conference:

Two invited speakers with opposing opinions are planned for each 'controversy.' They are not necessarily to confront one another in adversary debate, however. Rather, the speakers will each present his or her side of the argument for about a half-hour to forty-five minutes. Then, the moderator of each session will invite NERC members in the audience to ask questions of the speakers and carry on their own discussion among themselves. In other words, NERC members should come to the 1986 meeting not just to hear lectures, but prepared to participate in three separate open forums.¹²⁵

Edgerton's challenge to NERC members to participate more actively in the conference echoes the observation of David Berkowitz twenty years earlier that an absence of enthusiastic discussion had hampered the conference. Edgerton chose three contemporary subjects: the first was the dispute between artists and art historians concerning the on-going cleaning of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel frescoes in Rome; the second was whether or not the differing texts in the Quarto and Folio editions of *King Lear* revealed something new about Shakespeare's working methods; and the third considered the relative merits of "micro-" and "macro-history" as currently practiced by Renaissance historians in light of recent interest in critical theory and 'methodology.'¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Letter from Samuel Edgerton to 'Colleagues' (21 April 1986), NERCA 1.22.3 (emphasis in the original).

¹²⁶ Letter from Samuel Edgerton to 'Colleagues' (21 April 1986), NERCA 1.22.3. The description of the three controversies is taken verbatim from Edgerton's letter. The first "debate" involved Marcia Hall and Harold Bruder; the second featured Steven Urkowitz and George Hunter; and the third included Judith Brown and Vincent Ilardi.

In addition to organizing the inaugural conference at Williams, Edgerton immediately reached out to colleagues at Amherst College, Connecticut College, and Harvard University about hosting in future years.¹²⁷ In those letters he laid out a list of procedures that conference hosts should follow, and a timeline by which such tasks should be completed. He reiterated that the host institution should not invite its own faculty to be principal speakers; that "appropriate entertainment" should be arranged to follow the Friday night banquet; and that the provost or other academic officer should be prevailed upon to provide a budget of about \$3,500. Edgerton also noted his own preference of a "themed" conference, but cautioned that "historically the hosts have preferred simply to have a meeting which represents all the constituencies of our organization."¹²⁸ Connecticut College did indeed host NERC in 1987; it remains unclear whether a conference was held in 1988.

1989 marked the fiftieth anniversary of NERC, and thus merited a particularly significant celebration. Planning had begun as far back as 1984, when Jane Ruby had initiated conversations with the administration at Brown University about hosting a "reunion" conference in Providence. Those plans changed somewhat unexpectedly, however, when Samuel Edgerton collaborated with Wallace MacCaffrey, the former chair of Harvard's History Department, and Eugene Rice, executive director of the RSA, to propose a joint NERC/RSA conference in the spring of 1989.¹²⁹ The result was the largest conference in the history of NERC. Prominent scholars from across the country as well as from Europe, flocked to Cambridge. Art historian Lilian Armstrong of Wellesley College was signaled out for special recognition for her work on the Program Committee; she received a fulsome letter of thanks from Samuel Edgerton for her "indispensable help" in organizing the 1989

¹²⁷ Letter from Samuel Edgerton to Joel Upton (Amherst College) (23 Oct. 1986), NERCA 1.23.1; Letter from Samuel Edgerton to Nancy Rash and Robert Proctor (Connecticut College) (10 Dec. 1986), NERCA 1.23.2; Letter from Samuel Edgerton to Eugene Rice (RSA executive director) [re: a joint meeting in Boston in 1989] (13 June 1986), NERCA 1.24.1.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Letter from Samuel Edgerton to Eugene Rice (13 June 1986), NERCA 1.24.1; see also n. 27 above re: previous correspondence on this matter. MacCaffrey was chair of the Harvard History Department from 1972-75 and 1979-82; Rice was executive director of the RSA from 1966-82 and 1985-87.

conference, in which he raved that the conference had suffered "not a hitch, not a balk, not an error."¹³⁰

Like the conference organized by David Berkowitz at Brandeis twenty-five years earlier, the 1989 conference featured several exhibitions, including two at Harvard's Houghton Library and another at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.¹³¹ A companion symposium at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, on "Power, Patronage, and Prestige: Art under the Medici in 15th century Florence" offered another venue for Renaissance scholars on Friday afternoon. To accommodate the large number of sessions, the conference stretched to three days. Following introductory remarks from Samuel Edgerton as both NERC president and Program chair, the conference opened with a talk by Edward Cranz entitled "Fifty Years of NERC." In an amusing and whimsical style, Cranz traced elements of NERC's early history, focusing in particular on the contributions of Leicester Bradner and of the Brown Renaissance Colloquium.¹³² Cranz gathered reminiscences from more than a dozen early contributors to NERC, including Paul Oskar Kristeller who was then in ill health and unable to attend the meeting. Later that evening Anthony Molho moderated a round-table discussion on the provocative topic of "Is the Renaissance still what it used to be?" Friday witnessed twenty-eight sessions on all topics of Renaissance Studies, followed by a banquet and the annual Bennett Lecture, offered this time by Kathleen Weil-Garris Brandt of NYU on the recent discoveries in Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling. Saturday witnessed another dozen concurrent sessions, and a plenary devoted to recent trends in Renaissance economic history, chaired by Richard Goldthwaite. The conference ended with a concert of Renaissance music and cocktails at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

Clearly the scale of this joint meeting was far grander than what NERC was used to, and it is unfair (even inaccurate) to compare attendance,

¹³⁰ Letter from Samuel Edgerton to Lilian Armstrong (6 April 1989), NERCA 1.24.12.

¹³¹ At Houghton Library: "The First Roman Printers and the Idioms of Humanism" and "Italian Humanists in ten manuscripts from the Houghton Library" (with catalogue by James Hankins). At the ISGM: "Italian Etchers of the Renaissance and Baroque."

¹³² Cranz, "Fifty Years" (n. 1 above), passim. Cranz cites a few documents, such as the 1966-67 Newsletter but he makes no reference to the specific correspondence of NERC presidents and members, nor to the conference programs.

budget, etc. for this joint effort with the more modest results of the traditional regional meeting. Nevertheless, the 1989 meeting provides an opportunity to take stock of how both NERC and RSA were changing. The RSA was entering a period of tremendous growth, which continues unabated today; NERC, by contrast, remained similar in size and scope to previous decades. In reflecting upon the changes that took place under his leadership, Samuel Edgerton observed recently that "It was a time of lessening interest in local organizations as the national Renaissance Conference (RSA) was becoming more important as the choicer venue for presenting papers—which pre-empted much of our membership."¹³³ This divergence between the national organization and the regional ones has only increased in recent years, as graduate students and assistant professors look to a national forum rather than a regional one for presentation of research and networking opportunities early in their careers.

The Spring 1989 conference marked the effective end of Samuel Edgerton's tenure as President of NERC. One more conference would take place at Wesleyan in October of 1989, under the coordination of John Paoletti. As had occurred with both Gilmore and Berkowitz, Paoletti's organization of that conference propelled him into a leadership position in the following year. The Wesleyan conference followed the traditional model in most respects: two papers on Friday afternoon by Peter Stallybrass (Penn) and Jonathan Goldberg (Johns Hopkins), and two more on Saturday morning by art historians Anne Rosalind Jones (Smith) and Margaret Carroll (Wellesley), chaired by John Paoletti. Anthony Grafton (Princeton) gave a talk after the banquet on Friday evening about the Renaissance astrologer, doctor, and mathematician Girolamo Cardano, which was expanded and published in 1999 as *Cardano's Cosmos: The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer*.

One significant development during Samuel Edgerton's tenure concerns the title of the office that Edgerton assumed. As noted previously, there had never been a firm title for the person who led NERC. Leicester Bradner was christened the *pater academicus* of NERC¹³⁴; Myron Gilmore had described the office as the "Secretaryship or Chairmanship or whatever it is to be called"¹³⁵; and David Berkowitz portrayed his job as

¹³³ Email from Samuel Edgerton to the author, 12 April 2013.

¹³⁴ 1967 Newsletter, NERCA 1.7.2, 1.

¹³⁵ Letter from Myron Gilmore to Leicester Bradner (6 May 1959), NERCA 1.1.7.

"a functionary, variously described as a president, a general secretary, or a permanent chairman."¹³⁶ Jane Ruby actively resisted the title of "President," preferring instead to be referred to as the "coordinator" of NERC. Samuel Edgerton, however, firmly embraced the title of "President" and even had letterhead specially printed with this title on it. In the penultimate paragraph of his 1989 talk about the history of NERC, Edward Cranz commented that the question of "whether or not we should give our leader the formal title of president...[was] the closest that we ever came to a constitutional struggle."¹³⁷ Cranz then summarized the views of the victors: "As I remember it, the arguments in favor were that correspondence would be easier if one knew from whom one had heard and to whom one was replying, and further that less arm-twisting might be needed in arranging for the succession if the person knew to what post he was succeeding."¹³⁸ Cranz himself felt that the old-fashioned method had worked fine, and he pointed out his fear of "bureaucratic ossification" if the conference were to grow too large or too formal. Nevertheless, the transition to having a formal "President" of NERC was now in place and the executive officer of NERC retains that title today. Other Renaissance societies have been much less reticent to use the title of "President"; the SCRC, PNRS, and RMRA have all used this honorific from their earliest days. NERC's reluctance to use such a title for nearly half a century thus stands out as an unusual characteristic among its peers.

The Last Twenty-Five Years (1989–2014)

John Paoletti (1990–1998)

With Samuel Edgerton's resignation as president announced at the 1990 NERC at Amherst College, there were immediately calls from the floor that a committee should be constituted to appoint the new president.¹³⁹ The members of this *ad hoc* committee included Lilian Armstrong (Wellesley), Kevin Dunn (Yale), Nicola Courtright (Amherst College),

¹³⁶ 1966 Newsletter, NERCA 1.7.1, 1.

¹³⁷ Cranz, "Fifty Years," 758.

¹³⁸ Cranz, "Fifty Years," 758.

¹³⁹ Daniel Martin, "Newsletter Number One" (3 Nov. 1990), NERCA 2.6.2, 1.

Vincent Ilardi (UMass Amherst), Daniel Martin (UMass Amherst), and John Paoletti (Wesleyan). This "First Appointed Board" was charged by the NERC membership with several tasks, including: (1) Appoint a president from themselves or from the membership at large; (2) Study possible name changes for NERC; (3) Seek affiliation with the MLA; (4) Investigate annual dues or a membership fee; (5) Create a permanent Governing Board, and possibly appoint a secretary-treasurer and a vice-president.¹⁴⁰ The informality and lack of bureaucracy that had long characterized NERC was clearly being challenged here, with the creation of new positions, a new name, new dues, and a permanent governing structure.

The group met on 11 Dec. 1990 at John Paoletti's house in Connecticut. Given Paoletti's success at hosting a conference the previous year, his stature within the field, and his willingness to host the inaugural meeting, it is not surprising that he was elected as president for a term of three years. At this same meeting Daniel Martin was elected as the first treasurer of NERC and Nicola Courtright agreed to create a newsletter and serve as its editor.¹⁴¹ Per his own request, Samuel Edgerton was included *ex officio*.

With the 1990 conference behind him, Paoletti immediately focused upon the upcoming conference at Yale in early November 1991, which was significant in several ways. It marked the second time in three years that the conference was held at an Ivy League university, after an absence of nearly two decades. The topics also reflected the new currents of Renaissance Studies, including a strong interest in sexuality, alterity, and gender.¹⁴² The conference was designed by English Department faculty Kevin Dunn and John Rogers, but executed by Yale Conference

¹⁴⁰ Memorandum from Daniel Martin to "First Appointed Board" (5 Nov. 1990), NERCA 2.6.3; the agenda is repeated in a follow-up memo (21 Nov. 1990), NERCA 2.6.4; the agenda is identical to that in "Newsletter Number One" as per the previous note.

¹⁴¹ John Paoletti, "Notice for inclusion in Conference Notes of *Renaissance Quarterly*" (n.d. but probably Dec. 1990), NERCA 2.1.1; a second identical copy was sent to Michael Sappol of the RSA in summer 1991.

¹⁴² For example, James Saslow, "Critical Orientations: The Homosexual Tradition in Renaissance Historiography from Winckelmann to Wilde"; Eugene Rice, "Sodomy in the European Criminal Law, c.1350–1700"; David Quint, "A Reconsideration of Montaigne's *Des cannibals*"; Maureen Quilligan, "Catherine de Medici and Elizabeth I: The Space of Female Performance": all were papers presented at Yale in 1991.

Services, thus lending a certain professionalism to the proceedings that had not always existed previously. John Paoletti instituted a new tradition of convening the Governing Board just prior to the opening of the conference in order to review the previous year's achievements and to anticipate problems.¹⁴³ Other elements remained largely unchanged, such as Paoletti's frustration with managing the mailing list and the way in which, as he put it, "NERC seems to be living up to its rather haphazard history."¹⁴⁴

Despite the perennial difficulty of reconciling the mailing list, it is clear from extant documents that a new level of professionalism was evident in NERC under Paoletti's leadership. He called regular meetings of the Governing Board to solicit advice and to share the burden of choosing conference hosts, as well as to gain assistance in identifying new (and deceased) participants in NERC.¹⁴⁵ His memo of September 1992 posed important questions to his colleagues on the Governing Board:

As I look at other conferences across the country we seem to be anomalous in our size and in the character of our meetings. Do we want to maintain the small town quality of our meetings or should we look to change their intensity? Do you have any sense about whether our universities and colleges will continue to support NERC operations in times of financial retrenchment? The dollar squeeze may force us to change our operations considerably for the short term. I look forward to your ideas.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Memo from John Paoletti to Governing Board (22 Sept. 1991), NERCA 2.6.5; one month later, a more extended version of the memo was sent (22 Oct. 1991), NERCA 2.6.6.

¹⁴⁴ Letter from John Paoletti to John Rogers (n.d. but likely July/Aug. 1991), NERCA 2.7.3.

¹⁴⁵ In addition to the memos of 21 Nov. 1990 and 22 Oct. 1991 (see nn. 140, 143), see also the Memo from John Paoletti to Governing Board (24 Sept. 1992), NERCA 2.6.7.

¹⁴⁶ Memo from John Paoletti to Governing Board (24 Sept. 1992), NERCA 2.6.7. A full list of the Governing Board, including addresses and phone numbers, is included with this memo. In addition to the six members noted previously, the list included the conference hosts for 1992 (Patricia Emison) and 1993 (Jessie Ann Owens), as well as Samuel Y. Edgerton as *ex officio*.

Paoletti circulated a similar memo to the Governing Board exactly one year later, calling for a Board meeting just prior to the October 1993 NERC conference at Brandeis. The questions raised previously about the size and funding of NERC must have been addressed satisfactorily, because Paoletti's 1993 memo raises a series of new questions for his *consiglieri* to consider. These included "strong sentiment that we should have more sessions during the two days of the Conference, thus necessitating concurrent sessions," as well as a desire to maintain the plenary session and a move to adopt a call for papers to widen participation. The Board was also interested in eliminating honoraria (thus partially addressing the "dollar squeeze" noted above), and in identifying ways to involve more graduate students.¹⁴⁷

In the same memo, Paoletti pointed out to his board that he had agreed to serve only a three-year term, and that it was time "to begin discussions about who should succeed to the office of chief convener of meetings." Paoletti urged his colleagues to consider "a slate of possibilities" in identifying a replacement. He specified further that in his view it was critically important that the new president be "someone in a major urban area who might have the personnel resources to implement the changes in conference structure that we discussed last year but which I simply have not had the time to pursue."¹⁴⁸ Paoletti was unsuccessful in his bid to step down, however, and subsequently agreed to serve another three-year term. Nor do subsequent programs in the 1990s indicate concurrent sessions, wider participation, a plenary session, or the presence of graduate students as speakers.

The 1993 conference at Brandeis, organized by Jessie Ann Owens of the Music Department, adopted as its theme "Power and Illusion in the Renaissance City," with one session on civic pageantry in London and Germany, and another on urban space that focused on Florence. There were only four papers, plus the usual evening concert, in this case of fifteenth-century chamber music from the Capella Alamire Hampshire Consort. The 1995 conference, organized at Vassar by Benjamin Kohl and Nicholas Adams, chose the theme of "The Material City in the Renaissance." The program was expanded to ten speakers spread over four sessions, and—in a departure from past practice—focused exclusively upon

¹⁴⁷ Memo from John Paoletti to Governing Board (29 Sept. 1993), NERCA 2.6.8.

¹⁴⁸ Memo from John Paoletti to Governing Board (29 Sept. 1993), NERCA 2.6.8.

Italian topics. Doubtless that limited geographical range was in part the result of the Italianate research interests of the conference hosts. The conference also covered topics only in History and Art History, although a performance by the Vassar College Madrigals provided some musical content. In a letter of thanks to Vassar's president days later, John Paoletti praised the "imaginative planning and extraordinary efforts" of Kohl and Adams in organizing the conference, and further noted the large number of Vassar alumnae who were specialists in Renaissance art history.¹⁴⁹

No conference was held in 1994 or 1996 or 1998. These gaps suggest that administration of the conference was indeed becoming too much of a burden for Paoletti. In March 1997 Virginia Reinburg and Elizabeth Rhodes of Boston College hosted a conference on the theme of "Prayer: Situation, Representation, Enactment." For the first time in the history of NERC, the conference took place on only one day, although it still included ten speakers organized into three sessions. Case studies and examples from Spain, Italy, and Germany were included, as well as "final remarks" from Robert Scribner and Clarissa Atkinson of the Harvard Divinity School. Despite the fact that the conference lasted only one day, the speakers came from across the continent: North Carolina, Minnesota, New York, California, and even Ontario, Canada. In 1999, the conference returned to Boston College, this time under the aegis of art historians Pamela Jones and Gauvin Alexander Bailey. Given their respective interests, it is no surprise that the theme was again quite narrowly defined, as "Caravaggio's Culture in Renaissance Italy." The focus was again largely Italian, and again privileged the fields of history and art history. Interestingly, only one paper dealt explicitly with Caravaggio; all of the others examined aspects of early modern Italian culture. As the conference was a one-day event, no evening concert was organized, but a concurrent exhibition and catalogue edited by Franco Mormando, *Saints & Sinners: Caravaggio and the Baroque Image* were available to conference participants.

In addition to heralding the end of the millennium and a definitive turn toward both themed conferences and a one-day duration, the 1999 conference marked the beginning of Kenneth Gouwens' term as president of NERC. He would hold this position for nearly a decade, during which NERC returned to its prior tradition of a regular annual conference. John

¹⁴⁹ Letter from John Paoletti to Frances D. Fergusson (5 Nov. 1995), NERCA 2.5.3.

Paoletti, who had initially volunteered for just a single three-year term, ended up serving eight years as NERC president. His chief contribution was to create an active governing board and to introduce a stronger sense of professionalism. In reflecting upon his term of office, Paoletti observed that the numbers of Renaissance faculty in the 1990s were somewhat less than they are today, which made the process of recruiting both speakers and audience members more challenging.¹⁵⁰ Nevertheless, it is clear that he exceeded the stipulations laid down by Leicester Bradner and William Church in 1959, when they described the responsibilities of the NERC president in this way: "to keep the *ad hoc* committee alive (if necessary), write a letter or two..., and keep track of the list of members."¹⁵¹

Kenneth Gouwens (1998–2009)

Kenneth Gouwens assumed the presidency of NERC in 1998. A native Midwesterner who attended college in the South and graduate school in the West, Gouwens arrived at the University of Connecticut largely ignorant of NERC and its traditions. Following consultation with some of the senior scholars in the area, including members of his influential governing board, John Paoletti asked Gouwens to assume the mantle of president. Despite Gouwens' expertise in papal history, Gouwens notes that there was "no laying on of hands and no apostolic succession" for the transition, just an informal lunch in which Paoletti briefly summarized the responsibilities.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Email from John Paoletti to the author, 28 March 2013: "I recall that a good deal of our early history was a bit haphazard, having to rely on our own colleges to support the annual meetings. The numbers of Renaissance faculty were also somewhat smaller than they are now, so that attracting significant attendance to meetings and attracting challenging talks for the sessions was a challenge."

¹⁵¹ Letter from William F. Church to Myron Gilmore (8 Nov. 1958), NERCA 1.1.1 offering Gilmore the chairmanship of NERC.

¹⁵² Oral interview of K. Gouwens in Cambridge, MA (14 Jan. 2013), NERCA 2.28.1. Amidst Paoletti's file of correspondence is an undated typescript two-page document entitled "Organization of Annual Program," NERCA 2.6.11. It is possible that this document was written by Samuel Edgerton or even by David Berkowitz, but given Paoletti's penchant for organized memos, and its location in the middle of his NERC correspondence from the late 1990s, it seems more likely to have been authored by Paoletti, and thus to have served as the basis of his discussion with Ken Gouwens in 1998 about leading NERC.

Gouwens believed at the time that it was important for NERC not to become a preserve of either English literature or Italian Renaissance history and art, as these were subjects already well-represented at area institutions such as the UMass Center for Renaissance Studies. Rather, he wished to make NERC more broadly inclusive and more "democratic" in its outlook by appealing to scholars from a wide range of disciplines.¹⁵³ Gouwens insisted upon an interdisciplinary approach, and included this requirement in his "Guidelines for Organizers of the Annual Program": "It is mandatory that the topics and speakers represent a multi-disciplinary approach in the aggregate. Ideally, speakers should represent a range of geographical specializations and methodological approaches."¹⁵⁴ In an email to Dario Del Puppo of Trinity College about the 2004 NERC annual meeting, Gouwens warned that the proposed program on "Celebrating Petrarch" was too narrowly focused on Italian subjects. He wrote "While you and I may find things Italian most interesting of all, the NERC is by design and past practice not only interdisciplinary but also geographically wide-ranging."¹⁵⁵ In addition, wrote Gouwens, he "would not want the appearance of possibly steering the Conference toward my own special interests."¹⁵⁶ Gouwens made a similar point about the importance of interdisciplinarity in a letter to Arthur Kinney at UMass Amherst when planning the 2001 conference there.¹⁵⁷ As is evident from both correspondence

¹⁵³ Oral interview of K. Gouwens in Cambridge, MA (14 Jan. 2013), NERCA 2.28.1.

¹⁵⁴ Kenneth Gouwens, "Guidelines for Organizers of the Annual Program" (May 2001), NERCA 2.11.2-B.

¹⁵⁵ Email from Kenneth Gouwens to Dario Del Puppo (14 Aug. 2004), NERCA 2.12.3-A. See also the email of Dario Del Puppo to Kenneth Gouwens (16 Apr. 2002), NERCA 2.12.1, in which Del Puppo offered to host NERC as part of the celebration of the 700th anniversary of Petrarch's birth, and to coincide with a conference that Del Puppo and Eugenio Giusti were already planning at Trinity and at Vassar on successive days. Del Puppo had previously organized a NERC meeting at Trinity College in 2001, on the subject of "Emotion and Creativity in the Renaissance."

¹⁵⁶ Email from Kenneth Gouwens to Dario Del Puppo (14 Aug. 2004), NERCA 2.12.3-A. For the same reason, Gouwens declined Del Puppos's invitation of 16 July 2004 to give a paper at the conference on Petrarch in the 16th century.

¹⁵⁷ Email from Kenneth Gouwens to Arthur F. Kinney (10 Dec. 1999), NERCA 2.9.1.

and from the conference programs, Gouwens also emphasized the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in the two conferences held at his home institution in Storrs, Connecticut, in 2003 and again in 2006.¹⁵⁸

Most of the conferences in Gouwens's term as president did indeed possess a distinct interdisciplinary theme, such as "Emotion and Creativity in the Renaissance" (2000), "Renaissance Courts" (2001), "Teaching, Learning, and the Transmission of Knowledge" (2002), "Piety and Plague" (2005), or "Nature's Disciplines" (2007). Some themes became increasingly abstract, such as the conference at Boston University called simply "Values and Judgments" (2009), or Yale University's choice of "The Immaterial Renaissance" the following year (2010). Such consciously interdisciplinary themes reflect the broader changes in Renaissance Studies in the 1990s and at the turn of the millennium, as scholars in history, art history, and literature deliberately borrowed methodologies from other disciplines such as anthropology or queer studies. Modern Renaissance Studies also has less certainty about the core texts and key subjects of the field than it did a generation or two ago; thus, conference papers encompass a much broader range of subjects than previously, a reality reflected in NERC's conference programs.

Virtually all of these conferences in the 1990s preserved the one-day format. Some issued a general call for papers while others preferred to follow the time-honored tradition of the program chair (or program committee) selecting speakers. The near-absolute freedom of the program chair to determine the theme and the structure of the conference remained as it had in the past. Although the conference continued to rely upon faculty from the New England area for a majority of presentations, the trend of inviting scholars from far away became increasingly common. For example, during the 2000 conference at Trinity College, speakers came from South Carolina, Texas, Spain, and Sweden; the 2006 conference included speakers from Duke, Michigan, and Johns Hopkins.

¹⁵⁸ Letter from Kenneth Gouwens to Françoise Dussart (28 June 2002), NERCA 2.11.2-A: this letter requested \$4,000 in funding from the Univ. of Connecticut Humanities Institute (UCHI), and specified that "this conference explicitly promotes scholarly interchange across traditional academic boundaries, be they disciplinary or geographical," in accordance with the UCHI's mission. The 2006 conference lacked a theme but included papers ranging from anatomy and alchemy to humanism and subversive Renaissance music.

Gouwens also thought it important to continue the tradition of moving the conference to a new host each year, both to avoid wearing out the conference's welcome at the same institutions, and to encourage those institutions that had not traditionally hosted in the past. Reaching out to Renaissance scholars at colleges with small enrollments (or small travel budgets) was a way to broaden the impact of NERC across the region. Thus, the conference met at Trinity College (2000), Holy Cross (2005), and Wesleyan University (2008). Still, the conference often continued to rotate among those schools which had often hosted in the past, in part because they possessed the necessary funding and conference space, not to mention a cadre of Renaissance faculty to form the program committee: UMass Amherst (2001), Brown University (2002, 2007), University of Connecticut (2003, 2006), Boston University (2009), and Yale University (2010).

Gouwens did not continue the practice of having a formal governing board as Paoletti had, relying instead upon a network of colleagues, especially Evelyn Lincoln at Brown, who hosted a pair of conferences in 2002 and 2007. Gouwens's tenure from 1998 to 2009 also witnessed the transformation of communication from postal mail to email. The NERC mailing list increasingly became a file of email addresses, and Gouwens's own communication migrated toward the digital sphere. Such a transition is best captured in Gouwens's correspondence with Arthur Kinney on either side of the millennium. In mid-December 1999 Gouwens wrote to Kinney to ask if UMass Amherst would host NERC in 2001; he prefaced his request by saying "Please excuse the informality of e-mail, but I wanted to get a message to you sooner rather than later in this holiday mailing season." Kinney responded—with a hand-typed letter—on 11 December 1999, and again on 13 October 2001 with further information about the conference program and attendees.¹⁵⁹ Virtually all of Gouwens's subsequent communication from 2000 to 2009 was transmitted via email rather than "snail mail." Similar technological changes—the use of e-mail attachments to send the Call for Papers, the creation of websites to advertise the conference programs, and so forth—are evident throughout the NERC Archive for this period.

¹⁵⁹ Email from Kenneth Gouwens to Arthur F. Kinney (10 Dec. 1999), NERCA 2.9.1; Letters from Arthur F. Kinney to Kenneth Gouwens (11 Dec. 1999), NERCA 2.9.2 and (13 Oct. 2001), NERCA 2.9.6.

Tara Nummedal (2009–2013)

Historian Tara Nummedal of Brown University represented a distinct break from the past when she was selected to succeed Kenneth Gouwens as NERC president in 2009. A native Californian with a Stanford Ph.D., and a specialist in central Europe, alchemy, and the history of science, Nummedal was far removed from the traditional fields (both geographical and disciplinary) emphasized in Renaissance Studies generally and in NERC more specifically. This choice was not by accident. After consulting informally with longtime NERC participants, Ken Gouwens deliberately chose a successor who would bring a fresh perspective to the job and who would provide a challenge to the status quo of seventy years of tradition. Gouwens explained that he selected Nummedal for several reasons: (1) Nummedal would be the first female president of NERC¹⁶⁰; (2) Nummedal's academic expertise represented new areas in Renaissance Studies; (3) Nummedal possessed both strong organizational skills and strong digital skills.¹⁶¹ It helped, of course, that she was a tenured professor at Brown; not only did this appointment continue the legacy of Leicester Bradner, but it satisfied John Paoletti's earlier criterion that the president be "someone in a major urban area who might have the [necessary] personnel resources."¹⁶²

Nummedal's vision for NERC was to preserve its historical character and traditions, while modernizing it in subtle ways. Thus she continued the tradition of an annual fall conference, with particular emphasis upon interdisciplinarity and a broad theme each year. She continued to support

¹⁶⁰ Obviously Gouwens was unfamiliar with the short term of Jane Ruby from 1983–85.

¹⁶¹ Oral interviews conducted with Kenneth Gouwens (14 Jan. 2013) in Cambridge, and with Tara Nummedal (15 Jan. 2013) in Providence; summaries are at the NERC Archive, NERCA 2.28.1–2. See also the email from Ken Gouwens to Touba Ghadessi and Gen Liang (21 April 2013), NERCA 2.24.2, in which Gouwens wrote "When I consulted with my advisors about the selection of Tara, we all felt strongly that it was important to get someone whose focus was neither English Literature nor Italian history or art.... While both John [Paoletti] and I sought a diversity of presenters, like everyone else we have our own bailiwicks. So, it was all the more beneficial for NERC to get Tara to serve: someone conversant in the Italian scholarship, but doing methodologically innovative work centered on Germany, traditionally under-represented (when represented at all, which was rare) in the conference."

¹⁶² Memo from John Paoletti to Governing Board (29 Sept. 1993), NERCA 2.6.8.

the idea of "democratizing" NERC by encouraging institutions that had not hosted in the past to do so. She also solved the age-old problem of the NERC mailing list by harnessing the power of the Internet to have scholars self-subscribe to a moderated list-serve; while it is true that some potential members of NERC thus fail to be notified, it saves the conference money on mailing and printing costs as well as putting the onus for being informed more directly upon members. Nummedal also created a hybrid website-blog where information of interest to members, including the digitization of some archival material about NERC, could be posted.¹⁶³ Nevertheless, NERC continues to lag in the digital revolution; by Nummedal's own admission, the website is updated infrequently and it offers little in terms of two-way communication or exchange among members. Perhaps it is not surprising that NERC continues to cling to its traditional view of what the conference has been: an annual gathering of like-minded scholars, whose interests evolve with the times, but not a great deal more.

The first conference under Nummedal's leadership, at Yale in 2010, was a major event with nearly 150 scholars and graduate students in attendance. Organized by Francesca Trivellato and Christopher Wood, and flawlessly managed by Yale Conference Services, the conference experimented with several new approaches. The conference opened with a two-hour round table discussion in the morning, and a series of inter-related papers in the afternoon; these were followed by a distinct keynote address. Many of the papers were highly theoretical and drew heavily from literary criticism, new historicism, and post-modern outlooks. The theme of "The Immaterial Renaissance" was deliberately opaque. The 2010 NERC took advantage of Yale's Art Gallery, Beinecke Library, and Center for British Art by organizing brief tours of each.

The 2011 conference broke new ground in several ways, and was a strong contrast with the previous conference at Yale. It was held at a small liberal arts college (Wheaton) in a rural location (Norton, MA) on a much more modest budget. The theme of "Family Relations in the Renaissance" was a familiar and accessible one to historians, art historians, and literary scholars. Undergraduate students were deliberately involved as conference staff, exhibition curators, and campus guides. According to Tara Nummedal, one of the goals of having the conference

¹⁶³ The NERC website is at <<http://nercblog.wordpress.com>>.

at Wheaton was to demonstrate that small liberal arts colleges could host NERC as successfully as major research universities. The 2012 conference traveled to a new venue at University of Massachusetts Lowell but returned to a traditional topic. The theme of "Classical Revival and Reception in the Renaissance" resulted in a program with one morning session on "Classical Authority" and a second afternoon session on "Classical Authors." Among the speakers solicited by an open call for papers were several advanced graduate students; there was also a keynote address at the end of the day by James Hankins on "Renaissance Views of the Roman Republic."

The 2013 NERC returned to Brandeis University exactly twenty years after its last appearance there. Art historian Jonathan Unglaub chose the theme "Thresholds of Faith and Fantasy: Spiritual Journeys and Real Spaces." This theme effectively combined literary, art historical, and historical perspectives on questions of religious history, especially the question of "sacred and profane geographies" and the issue of "body and spirit." Five of the six papers focused on Italian topics, although Leonard Barkan's keynote address offered something of a balance by considering three vignettes from across early modern Europe. The 2014 NERC, celebrating its 75th anniversary, was held in Durham, NH at the University of New Hampshire under the leadership of Liz Mellyn. The theme "Cultures of Credit and Debt in Medieval and Early Modern Europe" emphasized economic history, a focus not seen in recent years at the NERC. The 2015 conference is tentatively scheduled to be held at University of Massachusetts Boston, another new locale. Thus, the recent history of NERC conferences would seem to suggest a consistent pattern of blending traditional foci (e.g., sixteenth-century Italian topics) with new theoretical paradigms and new institutional hosts.

Touba Ghadessi and Yuan-Gen Liang (2013-)

The selection of art historian Touba Ghadessi and historian Yuan-Gen Liang as NERC co-presidents in 2013 signaled another milestone in the history of NERC. Although their respective disciplines of art history and history are traditional ones for NERC, several aspects of their leadership (like that of Tara Nummedal) represent new directions. The creation of a co-presidency is perhaps the most obvious innovation. It was instituted both to lessen the administrative burden on the recipients as well as to

incorporate greater ethnic diversity in NERC's leadership. The geographical foci of Ghadessi and Liang are also new, as is the explicitly comparative and bi-national nature of their respective research agendas: Ghadessi has analyzed issues of anatomy and physical deformity in courts of Italy and France, while Liang has examined the "connected histories" of Spain and North Africa. Both scholars teach at Wheaton College, a small liberal-arts college far removed from the traditional locales of Providence, New Haven, or Cambridge. (Former NERC presidents Jane Ruby taught at Wheaton, and Samuel Edgerton taught at Williams, so the leaders of NERC have not always come from major research universities in urban centers).

Ghadessi and Liang were coorganizers of the 2011 NERC at Wheaton College, which emphasized inclusion of undergraduate students in conference planning and execution. Both Ghadessi and Liang strongly support interdisciplinary activities, an approach long associated with NERC and explicitly promoted by Gouwens and Nummedal as prior presidents.¹⁶⁴ In a letter to Ghadessi and Liang asking them to consider accepting the presidency of NERC, Tara Nummedal praised their "energy, creativity, professionalism, and commitment"; and she added "More importantly, though, your own expertise in French/Spanish, art history/history, etc. will ensure that NERC continues to represent a diverse intellectual agenda, rather than just the Italian Renaissance."¹⁶⁵ It is too soon to tell whether Ghadessi and Liang will move NERC in other new directions too. One of their first actions, at the 2013 meeting at Brandeis, was to convene an advisory board of a dozen Renaissance scholars to provide suggestions; topics included the possibility of a NERC workshop directed at graduate students, and of NERC-sponsored panels for the annual RSA conference. Nummedal also encouraged the new co-presidents to consider term limits, so that the position

¹⁶⁴ Ghadessi and Liang co-founded the Wheaton Institute for Interdisciplinary Humanities in Fall 2012. Liang is co-founder and current president of the Spain-North Africa Project (SNAP), which seeks to bring together scholars traditionally divided by language and geography to find common interests around the Mediterranean.

¹⁶⁵ Email from Tara Nummedal to Touba Ghadessi and Gen Liang (18 April 2013), NERCA 2.24.1. Ken Gouwens wrote a follow-up email explaining his perspective on the presidency (21 April 2013), NERCA 2.24.2. Ghadessi and Liang accepted the presidency in a letter to Tara Nummedal (13 June 2013), NERCA 2.24.3.

would become neither a sinecure nor an albatross, for themselves or their successors.¹⁶⁶

Conclusion

The New England Renaissance Conference has played a significant role in the promotion and propagation of Renaissance Studies during the last three-quarters of a century, particularly for the Northeast. Through the vehicle of an annual conference that has rotated from school to school, the members of the Conference have been able to share their recent research and to discuss the significant issues in the profession. If we look back to the observation of William G. Constable about the purpose of NERC in 1939–40, which he defined as "bringing together scholars of the Renaissance within a limited area for informal and frank discussion," it seems that NERC has not evolved much at all.¹⁶⁷ Given the enormous changes that have occurred within the field of Renaissance Studies since World War II—including transatlantic air travel, the rise of quantitative and computer-aided analysis, the emergence of social history, the digitization of archival material, the growth of the RSA, the proliferation of academic sub-specialties, and the debate over nomenclature between "early modern" and "Renaissance," to name just a few—it is remarkable how little NERC has changed. The New England Renaissance Conference has remained true to its founder's vision of a minimalist academic organization that somehow survives "in graceful disarray" decade after decade. Despite its lack of a budget, a staff, or a mission statement, the Conference has managed to prosper through the good will and generosity of academics and institutions across New England. In one sense, then, the New England Renaissance Conference is firmly rooted in the past and even a bit antiquarian. However, this allegiance to the past, while appropriate for an organization that celebrates a historic era, is not to suggest that NERC has remained immobile. The leadership and the members of NERC have introduced substantial changes along the way, including the

¹⁶⁶ Email from Tara Nummedal to Touba Ghadessi and Gen Liang (18 April 2013), NERCA 2.24.1.

¹⁶⁷ Letter from W. G. Constable to David Berkowitz (19 April 1966), NERCA 1.1.8 (n. 14 above).

championing of interdisciplinarity, the expansion of NERC's constituency, and a growing diversity in conference themes. Such changes reflect broader transformations in the academy and in the field of Renaissance Studies. The New England Renaissance Conference can thus be viewed, with caution and in comparison with its sister organizations, as a case study of how academic societies evolve, and more specifically of how Renaissance Studies has developed in the northeastern United States over the past seventy-five years.

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