2009

In the Beginning: ADE and the Big Bang Revolution

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Welcome to the celebration of the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of the Association for Documentary Editing. Some people have compared the origins of the ADE with the American Revolution. Others have linked it to the big bang theory. I prefer to think of it as a Big Bang Revolution. Anyway, today you will get a little of the inside story of the creation of ADE. You see, I was there.

And with me today are three individuals who have joined the ADE at different times in its history. Charlene Bickford, editor of the First Congress Project, who was also there at the beginning. Martha King, associate editor of the Jefferson Papers who joined the ADE somewhat later, and Lisa Francavilla, of the Jefferson Retirement Series and ADE’s current secretary, who joined much more recently. I asked them simply to give us a few words of reflection as ADE turns thirty.

But first, a few remarks. Let’s start with 1976, two hundred years after the Declaration of Independence. See, there I go again. I had been with the National Historical Publications and Records Commission for a decade. I remember those days well. It was in 1976 that the word-processing machine, the Wang 1200, was first introduced. I remember some of the editors began to talk about using word processors. I went down to the Washington Convention Center sometime in this period to visit a technology expo. And it was there at a table set up by the Wang Company that I got this advertising button that the folks were handing out. It says “My Wang Can Do Wonders.”

The word processors could, indeed, do wonders. Editors began to discuss their use. They also began to exchange information about other editorial concerns and practices. The NHPRC tried to encourage such interaction. By the mid 1970s, the NHPRC was not only providing grants to editorial projects but the Commission had also undertaken some educational efforts. With Ford Foundation and Mellon Foundation grants we launched a fellowship program that continues to this day. And we began a series of conferences of editors to discuss issues of mutual interest from transcription to annotation to new technologies.

We held one meeting at the University of Iowa, another in Atlanta in 1977, and a third in at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library in Hyde...
Park, New York, in April 1978. It was at the Hyde Park meeting that the idea of starting an association of editors took firm root. I must say, however, that before that meeting, one editor had been speaking with us at the NHPRC on a number of occasions and with other editors about the possibility of the formation of a new professional organization of editors and others interested in the work. That person was John Simon. John was the most ardent champion of the idea, the real founding father of ADE. John chaired the first session at the Hyde Park meeting. It was called “A National Organization of Editors?”

Now, I don’t know how much business the members of the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1787 conducted in pubs or hotels, but I can report that the birth of ADE owes some credit to the Golden Manor Motel down the street from the FDR Library. It was there in one of its small rooms that folks such as Linda De Pauw, Al Goldberg, Frank Burke, David Chesnutt, John Simon, and others discussed the idea long into the night.

I could say that most of the liquid consumed that night at the motel was either Pepsi or Seven-Up. I could also say that no one was smoking. I could also deny that one person there that night even had a flask. But those statements would be wrong.

Anyway, it was in the motel room, if my smoky memory is correct, that we decided on the name of the organization. At one point it was going to be the Association of Documentary Editors. Instead, we went for the more inclusive name.

It was in Hyde Park, then, that the group decided to hold a meeting to create a new organization. Seven months later it was off to the Chase-Park Plaza Hotel in St. Louis—November 1978. It was there that the Founding Meeting took place, chaired by John Simon who talked about how the ADE could be valuable in a number of ways—to exchange information, to lobby, and to provide mutual assistance. And it was there, on November 10, 1978, that about seventy
individuals signed their names to a list of attendees, pledging their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor—well, sort of. Arthur Link, who would become ADE's first president, was first to sign. There was no John Hancock among the two columns of signatures, although Constance Myers's signature was definitely the largest, edging from the first column into the second.

A year later, in November 1979, the ADE held its first meeting at Princeton University. The first session, entitled “The Solo Editor,” was chaired by Joel Myerson and included papers by Barbara Oberg, Warren Billings, and Claire Badaracco.

And so, the rest is history. For me, the ADE and the friends I have worked with and drank Seven-Up with over the years have been a special part of my life.

THE ASSOCIATION FOR DOCUMENTARY EDITING

PRESS RELEASE

At a meeting held in St. Louis, Missouri, during the Southern Historical Association Convention, over 60 persons unanimously voted to establish an Association for Documentary Editing. A Constitution for the new organization was adopted and the following officers elected:

President: Arthur S. Link, The Papers of Woodrow Wilson
President-Elect: Lester J. Cappon, The Newberry Library
Director of Publications: Robert A. Rutland, The Papers of James Madison
Secretary-Treasurer: Charlene N. Bickford, Documentary History of the First Federal Congress

The association’s object is “to encourage excellence in documentary editing by providing means of cooperation and exchange of information among those concerned with documentary editing and by promoting broader understanding of the principles and values underlying the practice of documentary editing.” All persons with an interest in documentary editing are encouraged to join. Annual dues are set at $15.00 (regular) and $7.50 (students, retired and unemployed) and may be sent to Charlene N. Bickford, First Federal Congress Project, George Washington University, Washington, D.C. 20052.
Association for Documentary Editors
Organizational Meeting Report Attendance
November 10, 1975

David C. West
Richard K. Swenson
Mary A. DuBois
Charles F. Hothern

Arthur S. Leick
Charles E. Hovde
Ann S. Jenson
Alen F. Jenkins
Donald J. Dauken
John L. Bloom
Thomas E. Ferguson
Robert O. McComas
Charles B. Lyon
George E. Vast
Frederick Ansberry
Helen O'Keefe
David R. Johnson
Bernard F. Michelson
R. B. W. Whitworth
Wayne Carter
F. R. T. Seaman
Roger D. Bridgman

The Chase-Park Plaza Hotel
229 N. Kingshighway Blvd., St. Louis, Mo. 63108
314/861-2600

Founding Members of the Association of Documentary Editors
November 10, 1975
The Chase-Park Plaza Hotel
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314/861-2600

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The Lodge of the Four Reasons, St. Louis, Mo.
Operated by The Chase-Park Plaza Hotel

William G. Henderson

Jeffrey D. Crow
Robert M. Meltzer
Jack E. Jordan
Mary A. Ventre
E. F. Smith

Wayne H. Bell
Joe Weidler
Alan R. Cook
Bruce Harder
John Barlow

The Lodge of the Four Reasons, St. Louis, Mo.
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