

NOTES FROM BRUSH HILL STUDIOS

OCTOBER 1, 2003

Brush Hill, Washington, CT

Readers of this column know that it is designed to introduce members of the Society to each other and thereby encourage dialogue among them. Hopefully, this will lead to a broader understanding of marine art, techniques, approaches, practical pointers, etc. and work to the reader's advantage. We usually interview two or three artists in the Society but devoted the last issue to the life history of Fellow David Thimgan who, at the young age of 48, died this past June.

This issue is devoted to another special life history, that of the Society itself on this, its 25th, anniversary. I had been asked to deliver the after-dinner address at our Annual Meeting later this month in Carmel, California and relate this history. Not only are after dinner speeches usually unwelcome and downright deadly if addressed to artists without redeeming visuals, but to talk about "history"? To a group of Americans, focused as we are on the next twenty-four hours, next week and maybe next year? Isn't there truth in the words of that important American, Henry Ford, "History is bunk!?" And, if history is the sum of humankind's experience, isn't the *present* more relevant than the *past* since more people are experiencing the *present* than have ever lived on the planet in the *past*? Besides, things now are changing so fast. What is possibly relevant in the pre-computer, pre-fax, pre-Fed Ex – not to mention pre-Internet – age when our Society was established to our 21st Century horizon? Is there not a strong underpinning of American culture in the words of the late American poet, Carl Sandburg, who declared, "History is a bucket of ashes."?

I declined the invitation. But our colleagues would not let me off the hook. "Could you devote your next *Notes from Brush Hill* column to it? We have so many members who came on board long after the Society was established and by and large they know very little about its creation and its creators. And who better than you since you were there?" Little did these friends know about my memory skills! Those who know my memory better have suggested it was this alone that explained my twenty years on Wall Street, for, having forgotten what happened the day before, I would go back day after day.

There were other reasons to hesitate writing about the history of the Society. But I was only to learn about these after I reluctantly agreed to write it. Principal among these was the scarcity of data. None of these deficiencies are to be laid at the door of our dedicated Managing Director, Nancy Stiles. From the date of her taking office in 1987, the records are complete on all fronts. But the fact is that the official records of the first ten years of our history are, shall we say, "incomplete." The Society has only one set of minutes for the most dynamic and formative period of its history – the first eighteen months when formal meetings were reportedly held monthly. In fact, the second set of minutes in our records dates over three years after the Society was formally established on March 1978. Another important source of information is the Newsletter. The earliest issue in the Society's files dates to 1984. Yet mimeographed sheets serving as the Newsletter were written from the beginning. The earliest I have seen personally is dated March, 1979. A third source of recorded data is the National Exhibition Catalog. But here, the Society does have a complete set. (A call for assistance in finding certain documents is posted in this Newsletter. Hopefully working together and with those who were involved in the early years but who are no longer in the Society, we will be able to reconstitute a complete record of minutes and Newsletters.)

Given the incompleteness of data in our early history, it makes one appreciate the comment from the preeminent American historians whose seminal works documented the history of man, Will and Ariel Durant: "History is mostly guessing; the rest is prejudice." And this is another reason that prompted me to

hesitate writing about the Society's history. Very determined and dedicated individuals who often did not see eye-to-eye drove the creation and evolution of the Society. Relating this history without prejudice or perceived prejudice is probably impossible so why become a lightning rod for those whose prejudice does not agree? This curious fact is indisputable however: Virtually all of the original prime-movers, the main driving wheels that launched the Society and shouldered the responsibilities and gave so generously of their time, effort and money during the formative years are either deceased or have withdrawn from the Society. Fellow William G. Muller – the one who gave us our distinctive logo 25 years ago – is the exception. The others are gone. Indeed, you have to go to the fifth year of the Society's history before you encounter an Officer or Director who is still a member of the Society, Muller and myself excluded. Like the Big Bang, our genesis was made up of highly charged and energized elements; they gave mightily of this energy. It is now spent but remains as an example, a standard for those of us who remain.

Notwithstanding all of the aforementioned reasons not to write about the Society's history, I agreed to do it. My overall purpose is to:

1. Credit and acknowledge the women and men from whom we have inherited this remarkable American art organization.
2. Better understand and appreciate why the Society exists and how this *raison d'être* had to be hammered out on the anvil of experience.
3. To take stock of where the vibrancy is in the Society so that we can learn from it and help promote it throughout this national organization. And finally,
4. Simply to document basic facts about the Society in one place. That place is not in this article but in the Society's records. Indeed, it makes for dull reading but I plan to have a copy of an Excel spreadsheet at Carmel for all to see. (See **caveat** below) For each of our twenty-five years it documents the Officers, the members of the Board, the Fellows, the Business Manager/Managing Director, the Assistant Editor and Editor of the Newsletter, the members of the Advisory Board, the location and dates of the Annual Meetings, the location and dates of the National Exhibitions, the locations and dates of Regional Exhibitions and other significant events, such as the presentation of the Iron Man Award, death of leading ASMA figures, introduction of new technology such as the ASMA website and e-mail directories, etc. This should make the task much easier for the next one to undertake an article about the history of the Society.

Caveat: This spreadsheet data – which is used throughout this article – is neither perfect (since my source material is often poor) nor necessarily consistent with other interpretations. For instance, by and large I have given the year of service as that following the Annual Meeting in which one was elected since, in recent years, that has been a late autumn event. Thus, if Kim Weiland were elected President in Carmel, he would appear in the Excel spreadsheet as President for 2004. The confusion with this approach arises, however, in the earlier years of our history when our Annual Meeting was in the middle of the year. Thus, for instance, Chris Blossom was President on July 25, 1986 but Peter Egeli took over later that day, at the close of the Annual Meeting. Here, I have presented Peter as President for 1986. Beyond all of this, of course, I might have processed the data mistakenly.

Our history can be chronicled into three eras: **I. The Beginning – 1976 – 1979; II. The Evolutionary Years 1979 – 1988; III. Era of Growth and Management Transition 1989 to the Present.**

I. The Beginning 1976 - 1979

We stand on the shoulders of giants. A dozen of them were responsible for the creation of the Society. But there were others whose work decades before set the stage. Long before Operation Sail or “Op Sail” occurred in New York on our national bicentennial, Mystic Seaport served as a Mecca for those attracted to the sea and an earlier era. It was Mystic that commissioned the artist who eventually became our first president, Charles Lundgren, to do a series of paintings on their famous whaler, the **Charles W.**

Morgan. And it was Mystic, with its restored village and ships, that attracted Peter Stanford and his wife Norma who were looking to save the South Street section of Lower New York City. And it was Mystic where these giants met.

Op Sail awakened interest in our maritime history and art was one important facet of that history. The General Manager for Op Sail was Frank O. Braynard. When he wound up that task in 1976, he became the Director of History for the South Street Seaport Museum and a Trustee and founding member of the National Maritime Historical Society (NMHS) where Peter Stanford was President. *Sea History* is the informative and highly regarded voice of the NMHS and it was through this magazine that Peter threw his organizational weight behind the first effort to mount a marine art exhibition following Op Sail. However an husband and wife team, Robert and Maryanne Murphy, drove this effort and mounted an exhibition at the National Boat Show in the New York Coliseum (like so many in this story, no longer around) with the generous support of the National Association of Engine and Boat Manufacturers, sponsors of the Show. (The Murphys, now divorced, are the only two of those still living I was not able to interview since I could not find them – even on the Internet).

Bob Murphy was a force on Wall Street and he and his wife loved the sea. They channeled their considerable energy into getting a message across and even made it the name of their exhibition: *Marine Art Lives!* Peter Sanford devoted much of the sixth issue of *Sea History* to reviewing the show. His headlines read: “If you think the great age of marine art is past, look again: *Marine Art Lives!*” The exhibition ran from January 15th - 23rd, 1977 and was seminal in setting the stage for the creation of the Society. As such, it is instructive in our story to look at the participating artists, some of whom are among the other giants that created the Society and two-thirds of whom were to participate in the Society when it was created a year later. (Note for subsequent reference that a quarter of the participating artists were foreign born.)

- Charles J. Lundgren: American who grew up on the waters of Long Island Sound, studied at the Parsons School in New York followed by Continental studies in several countries before WWII. In the 'Sixties he brought vision and sustaining help to the newly undertaken South Street Seaport effort and, as such, could be ranked as one of its founders. He retreated from his beloved Sound because he found the water too “distracting.” He moved to a colonial farmhouse near New Preston, in Northwestern CT where he ensconced himself in a cellar studio. Several early meetings of the Society were held there in that smoke filled, windowless room. Charlie was pivotal in steering the Society through the rough waters of its first months and went on to serve as our President for the first two years and as one of our first Fellows.
- Michael Beddows: English
- George F. Campbell: Born in Liverpool, England. Trained as a naval architect in which capacity he worked with the Royal Mail Lines and designed ferryboats for the London County Council and worked with Alan Villiers and Frank Carr on the renovation of the *Cutty Sark* in Greenwich. In 1963 he moved to New York where he became an advisor to South Street Seaport Museum and the NSMH as well as an exhibition designer for the American Museum of Natural History. This multi-faceted individual was a fine marine artist as well as a historian and illustrator of books about the Royal Mail Lines and the China clippers and even *Jackstay*, a manual for model builders. He was an early member of the Society.
- Fred Freeman: Born in Boston, raised in Maine but eventually settled with his wife Katie in Essex, CT where he was one of the founders of the Essex Art Association. Before WWII he and his wife, a handsome couple indeed, would model. He was a magazine illustrator in the 'Twenties and 'Thirties and then served in the Navy during WWII. This opened many opportunities for research and illustration with the U. S. Naval Institute, publications such as Scribner's *Pictorial History of the U. S. Navy* and Time-Life and Reader's Digest books including *Two Years before*

the Mast. Fred was party to the early formulations of the Society and became a Fellow. He became a Board member in 1980, a position he held for seven years. He died in 1988.

- Kipp Soldwedel: American educated at Yale '36 and recipient of the Prix de Rome scholarship for study under John Frazer at the Rhode Island School of Design. Became a portrait painter with a love of nautical subjects. He was to participate in the First Exhibition of the Society but lost interest in it thereafter.
- Frank O. Braynard: American who we met in the above text as the General Manager of Op Sail in 1976 and as a trustee and founding member of the NMHS and the Steamship Historical Society. He worked for various shipping companies while writing eleven books. His art is based on his life long experience with ships. It was this wide network of connections with shipping companies and potential underwriters for ASMA events that placed him for years on our Advisory Committee.
- Melvin O. Miller, Jr.: Baltimore born in 1937 he graduated from the Maryland Institute of Art in 1959 where he studied under Jacques Maroger – the colorful Frenchman known to generations of our Egeli family who sought to recreate the medium thought to be used by the Great Masters of European art the formula for which did not survive Impressionism and Modern art. (As the result of his work, the medium is available now both in the Flemish and Italian versions. Although produced by different companies it is known by his name, Maroger. If you glaze in oils, you should try this medium if you do not use it already.) Miller became an Artist Member of the Society during the early years.
- Robert Sticker: American. Navy pilot during WWII who took advantage of both his experience and the GI Bill to study at the Arts Students League in New York while he worked at the petroleum company, Caltex. Frank Reilly, one of his teachers at the League, emphasized knowing your subject. This rigorous regimen of research and personal experience led to the beautiful work he exhibited in the Society where he became a Fellow during the early years.
- Gordon Ellis: An English naval architect-turned-painter active on both sides of the Atlantic.
- Mark Greene: Here is one of our giants. Born in Philadelphia and studied at the Graphic Sketch Club and the Philadelphia Museum School of Art, he worked as an advertising illustrator in New York until 1967 when he began to pursue his bliss – painting ships and the sea. Mark is usually mentioned in the company of Charles Lundgren, William Muller, John Stobart and Os Brett when you listen to those who knew the times leading up to the creation of the Society. Mark was not only a dynamo, but was battling cancer and losing his eyesight while he determinedly gave his last to getting the Society off the ground. He produced the catalog for the First National Exhibition, served on our first Board and remained on it until 1985. He received the First Iron Man Award in 1980.
- John Marcy Mecray: From a long line of American ancestors and raised in New Jersey, he graduated from the Philadelphia College of Art in 1961. He worked as a freelance illustrator and taught at the Philadelphia College of Art. Exposed to the sea as a member of a crew, his dormant love awoke. He quit his career as an illustrator and moved to Newport, RI where he made a name for himself with his distinctive approach to rendering yachts. He became an Artist Member in the early years of the Society's history.
- Ned Herrmann: American painter.
- Oswald Longfield Brett: Australian with a yearning for the sea from boyhood. Only when he finished his education studying under the well-known Australian painter John Alcot and his studies at the East Sydney Technical College would his parents allow him to go to sea. From deck hand on coastal steamers to square riggers and ocean liners, he gained his first hand experience of the sea only to eventually settle in New York where he became involved with the South Street Seaport Museum and painted and illustrated. As noted above, Os was usually in the company of the four artists who launched the Society: Charles Lundgren, Mark Greene, Bill Muller, and John

Stobart. In this capacity he provided encouragement but he did not participate further when it was eventually established. But this early support was important.

- William G. Muller: This is another of our giants. Born in New York City in 1936, he was exposed to riverboat traffic on the Hudson, eventually becoming a quartermaster on one of the Day Line steamers when he was 18. He studied at the Pratt Institute and the School of Visual Arts and went on to work in commercial art – all the while distracted by the Hudson River boats. He is one of the four artists who launched the Society and he served on the Board until 1985. He was one of the first Fellows. True to his love of river steamers, he has also been instrumental in establishing the Hudson River Maritime Museum in Rondout, NY once a thriving port on the Hudson River between Albany and New York City where the Delaware & Hudson Canal brought coal from the mountains of Pennsylvania to be shipped to New York City and points beyond.
- Sandford B. Downing: American painter schooled at the Art Students' League and the Franklyn School of Professional Art in New York, *inter alia*, and overseas in Europe, she was to participate in the First Exhibition of the Society but lose interest in it thereafter.
- Dean P. Waite: American painter.

It is interesting that John Stobart did not participate in the exhibition. He had arrived from England and had begun his successful career with an exhibition at the Kennedy Gallery in New York City. Bill Muller had written him after seeing his work at the Kennedy Gallery, asking if he might become a paying apprentice, for he knew he loved his riverboats but recognized John could teach him a lot about rendering them. But apprenticeship was not in the cards, for John's career was already taking off but he did write and suggest some sort of marine art organization be created, perhaps along the lines of the Royal Society of Marine Artists in London. Maryanne Murphy, an energetic promoter, was part of Stobart's world in New York. Peter Sanford knew and was backing Bob and Maryanne Murphy in their Coliseum exhibition while Peter and Charlie Lundgren were already working together on South Street. The circle was soon closed and the first crew of ASMA appeared when in March 1978, under the aegis of the National Maritime Historical Society chaired by Alan Choate, papers were filed with the State of New York to set up a not-for-profit organization called the American Society of Marine Artists in March of 1978.

The story to this point is told in the first roster of Officers and Directors:

1978

Officers

President: Charles J. Lundgren

Vice President: John Stobart

Secretary: Alan Choate

Treasurer: Maryanne Murphy

Directors

Mark Greene

William G. Muller

Peter Sanford

Meetings were frequent in the year leading up to the filing and the frequency was to continue if not increase during the balance of 1978 for many practical day-to-day matters had to be addressed, policy matters decided, finances addressed and artists gathered for the Society's First National Exhibition, then called the First Annual Exhibition. William G. Muller and Mark Greene produced the catalog, exhibition poster and but many parties were involved contributing time, effort, expertise as well as funds. It is interesting to note the recognition given in that First Exhibition Catalog to other marine oriented organizations, such as The Greenwich Workshop Gallery (which, incidentally, was hosting its Fourth Annual Exhibition of Marine Art in 1978), The Atlantic Gallery of Georgetown, The Annapolis Marine Art Gallery and the Philadelphia Maritime Museum (now known as the Independence Seaport Museum).

The First Exhibition was at the U.S. Customs House Exhibition Hall at Six World Trade Center in New York City. It opened November 15, 1978 and closed shy of a month later, on December 13th. The

official sponsors were the United States Customs, the National Maritime Historical Society and the New York City National Shrines Association. Fifty-five artists mounted eighty-three works, all paintings. It is interesting to see a healthy West Coast representation even then. This is attributed to connections between those involved in maritime history, in particular, between Peter Sanford and the late, legendary Karl Kortum, founder of the San Francisco Maritime Museum (now run by the U.S. National Parks Service) and the connections Karl had with the recognized painter, now deceased, Charles E. Stanford then from Oregon. He had quite a following of students and admirers in California, Oregon and Washington. With him came our own Fellow Norma Jay then from the North West but now in California, our own Fellow Mark Myers then living in England but from the West, Charles Lock, Al Helner, H.J. Gorin, Dale B. Gallon, Vivian Caldwell, John R. Daniell, and John E. Robinson all from California, and finally but last in no one's eyes, our own Fellow and Cape Horner, Thomas Winchester Wells from Washington. Other parts of the United States outside the North East were represented as well including New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia and Florida. In fact an impressive twenty percent of the artists came from the West and a total of forty percent from outside New England.

During this last phase of what I arbitrarily define as **The Beginning 1976 – 1979**, a debate surfaced about the nature of the Society. Recall all of the participants had a blank canvas before them. In terms of marine art organizations, the most visible was across the Pond, the Royal Society of Marine Artists, and for this reason – and given the number of Brits that were involved to various degrees at this time, it received a good deal of attention as a possible example to follow. Recall also that this was the beginning of the Western Art boom and several artists asked, “If representational art works in the West, why shouldn't it work in marine art?” James D. Cox, the Director of the Grand Central Art Galleries in New York – an important man and place at this time in marine art and one who was to host the Second and Third Annual Exhibitions of the Society – called attention to the growing interest in American art, especially marine art. He noted that in 1978 and 1979 three marines attracted among the highest prices ever paid for American art: George Caleb Bingham's “The Jolly Flatboatmen” (\$980,000), Frederic Church's “Icebergs” (\$2,500,000) and Winslow Homer's oil depicting a sea rescue (\$1,500,000). Cox counseled that if the Society could successfully demand quality performance from its members and deliver a critical mass of work periodically, the Society could become an important part of the American art scene.

The “commercial verses museum” debate which is the hallmark of what I call **The Evolutionary Era 1979 – 1988**, certainly has its roots in the beginning years but the heated debate in 1978 was about the nature of the organization – whether it was to be run by a professional staff or run “by and for” artists. Maryanne Murphy, who was certainly one of the giants in creating the Society, was performing much of the role of an executive director in mounting the Coliseum show and in the formal creation of the Society in the months thereafter. In fact, this was formally acknowledged in the First Annual Exhibition Catalog with the statement:

“The A.S.M.S. wishes to convey it's (*sic*) appreciation to Maryanne Murphy, whose energy, persistence and love of marine art have contributed so much to the existence of the society and this exhibition.”

From her point of view, it was logical that the Society should be run by a professional staff, headed by her. Less clear in the surviving records are her reported aspirations to represent a number of the ASMA artists commercially.

But Peter W. Rogers and James E. Mitchell arrived on the ASMA scene in 1978 with a different point of view. Pete and his wife Beatrice had come to visit New York from Massachusetts in order to join William G. Muller and his wife Paulette on an overnight steamboat cruise up the Hudson to Albany during the 1977 fall season. This is how Pete was introduced to the Society. Some months later when he had

become more involved, he and the others at ASMA received a “nasty letter” - to use Pete’s words – from an artist he did not know, James E. Mitchell. The letter suggested that those running ASMA did not know what they were doing. Rather than reply by letter, Pete recalls that he called him “and as soon as I demonstrated reciprocal pugnacity, we immediately hit it off.” These two were to play an important – if, as some recall, long-winded – role at the “Constitutional Convention” following the opening of the First Exhibition. Important parts of this three-day affair occurred in gin mills of Lower Manhattan but when it was over every possible future for the new Society had been examined and discussed.

The dichotomy of views between Maryanne Murphy and Rogers and Mitchell became clearer as the latter two called for a Society run by artists. Eventually this view prevailed and in the Spring of 1979 Maryanne Murphy resigned, replaced by Muller who became acting Treasurer, and Rogers stepped up to become the Secretary of the organization. The next year, 1980, he was elected President, a post he held until surrendering it to James E. Mitchell in 1982. These two, Rogers and Mitchell, constitute the last of the giants who began the Society and they were to have a determining influence in the next era.

II. The Evolutionary Era 1979 – 1988

When all of these changes in 1978 and early 1979 sifted themselves out, the Officer and Board roster showed a cast that would be largely responsible for taking the Society into the **Evolutionary Era 1979 – 1988**.

1979

Officers

President: Peter W. Rogers
Vice President: Charles R. Robinson
Secretary: Ann Rogers
Treasurer: Charles R. Robinson

Directors

Mark Greene **James E. Mitchell**
William G. Muller **Peter Stanford**
Henry Holt **A. Lyon**
John Reilly

While the energetic presences of Peter W. Rogers (on the Board until 1986) and James E. Mitchell (President in 1982 and 1983 and on the Board until 1986) continued to be very evident in the early 'Eighties, Christopher T. Blossom (President in 1984 and 1985) and Peter E. Egeli (President in 1986 and 1987) became significant forces during this era also. Several served in lesser capacities but with similar dedication: James Capua (on the Board for ten years beginning 1981 and Vice President 1984 – 84); Fred Freeman (on the Board from 1980 – 1987; he died in 1988); Victor Mays (on the Board from 1980 – 1986 and Vice President 1982 – 83); William Mollard (on the Board for ten years beginning 1981); Frank Handlen (on the Board from 1981 – 84); James Taylor (on the Board from 1984 – 89); and Daniel Perepelitza (on the Board from 1981 - 85 and Secretary 1982 – 85).

While this new blood was pumped into the Society’s management, the remaining giants from the Beginning Era gradually phased out. Peter Stanford stayed on the Board until 1981; William G. Muller, until 1985; and John Stobart, until 1980. Peter Stanford continued to support the Society with valuable publicity coverage in his *Sea History* until he retired last year. The demands of a very successful career lured John Stobart away soon after he left the Board. And, of course, Bill Muller remains with us as an active Fellow – the only remaining member who participated in the Society’s entire history.

The minutes of these years show all of the decisions and problems of a young organization. These included such things as: Mounting new Exhibitions, letterhead designs, efforts to increase the frequency of the Newsletter – which started out formally with two issues in 1979, efforts to grow the membership and then the struggle to cope with success, etc. The Society has an attractive tradition of expressing gratitude and its roots can be seen in these early years. “In the era when men were made of iron and ships of wood” was

the basis for recognizing unusual performance to the Society. The “Iron Man “ award, a hefty bronze plaque embossed with the recipient’s name and proper text along with our logo, was first given in 1980 to one of our important financial supporters, Adrian Hooper and to one of our giants, Fellow Mark Greene. (A giant he was and this was further recognized in 1986 when the Board passed a resolution that henceforth the award would be known as the “Mark Greene Iron Man Award.”)

In 1982 it was awarded to Elias J. Kulukundis in recognition of his critical support in the Fourth Exhibition at the Peabody Museum of Salem the year before. Thereafter, it went to our first female recipient. Ann Rogers, as quiet as her brother Pete was outspoken, was corralled (as was to a lesser extent Pete’s other sister, Susan) into working worked tirelessly for the Society during these early years, performing many of the tasks now done by our Managing Director, Nancy Stiles. Eventually, the Board recognized this and decided to pay her on an hourly basis. In tribute to her dedication and financial sacrifice she was presented with the Award among quips about the “Iron Maiden Award.” Ann turned over these responsibilities to Kathryn Coster in 1985 who, in turn, relinquished them to our Nancy Stiles in 1987. If Ann Rogers earned the Iron Maiden Award, can you imagine what we will have to come up with to recognize Nancy’s putting up with this group of artists and their spouses for sixteen years now?

The enthusiasm evident in the newsletters and in official documents is contagious. Our Exhibitions were mounted annually with talk at one point of making them even more frequent. Recall that our early Exhibitions (then called the “First, Second, etc. Annual Exhibition ASMA”) were “for sale” shows. As you will see in the aforementioned Excel spreadsheet, the museum show at the Peabody in Salem, MA was the exception to the rule for the first seven Exhibitions. But that indefinable element evident in so many gallery/artist relationships coupled with jealousies among galleries interested in hosting our Exhibitions gradually surfaced. At the same time there was a growing realization – as we all lived through this changing period – that this commercial aspect was distracting and occasionally divisive for the Society, causing us to lose sight of our original noble purposes to promote American marine art and history – not our pocketbooks.

John H. Reilly, a friend of Jim Mitchell and an established Wall Street admiralty lawyer, was asked to join the Board in 1981. “Jack” was in that position until 1985 when he stepped down but continued to serve the Society on a *pro-bono* basis as its attorney until 2001 when he was replaced by David V. Smalley, a retired corporate litigator from Debevoise & Plimpton in New York City and an avid sailor. Jack’s record of dedication and commitment is remarkable and the Society is most indebted to him for it. Although the Society was registered in New York State under its not-for-profit regulations, it did not have tax-exempt recognition from the IRS and, as such, could not receive grants or funds on a tax-deductible basis for the donor. An attempt had been made to achieve this earlier but the “for sale” Exhibitions the Society was then mounting was held against us as evidence that we really were a trade organization seeking to benefit our members financially. So when Jack arrived on the scene he began to discuss the merits of becoming a fully recognized tax-exempt organization. The Peabody Museum Exhibition in 1981 was a fortunate break, for it showed that we could attract museum hosts and did not have to rely on commercial galleries.

Chris Blossom and Peter Egeli joined the Board the year after Jack and quickly picked up on the discussion then underway about commercial verses museum venues. Supported by Mitchell and Rogers and the majority of the Board, a resolution passed in 1984 when Chris was President stated that it was the policy of the Board that only museum, non-sale exhibitions would be undertaken in order to provide the IRS with evidence that we merited a tax-exempt status. By 1987, when Peter Egeli was President, the Society had another museum venue to its credit, the Eighth National at the Mariners’ Museum in 1985 – 86. Jack Reilly was directed by the Board to file a new application with the IRS by May 1, 1987. Within a year it would be granted.

III. The Era of Growth and Management Transition 1988 – Present

To Serve American Marine Art through the Broader Public

Thus within ten years after the Society was launched it came to understand more clearly the two basic options that would determine its future: to become a commercially oriented organization looking inward to serve as a trade organization or to become a tax-exempt educational organization looking outward to promote American marine art and history. It set off in the very beginning in 1978 to be the latter and the first decade confirmed the wisdom of staying the course. Thus it applied for and got from the IRS the required 501.C.3 status. This set the stage for pursuing the next aspiration: To find fine art museums to host our Exhibitions in order to educate the broader public that our art is art and should not be dismissed as genre art. Marine museums already knew this so, as appreciative as the Society was and is to marine museums for the valuable role they played in launching us into the world of museums, the Society came to recognize that it was really preaching to the converted while its real audience should be the public at large. It might be noted that there is sentiment among members of the Board that if we continue to mount traveling National Exhibitions, we could make them three venue shows and include a maritime museum, for not only do the converted like to hear the gospel from time to time, sometimes they need to hear it. Moreover, such shows with entrance fees/donations not only bring in much needed financial resources to our struggling kinsfolk, but help them in our common goal of promoting American marine art and history.

The 501 C. 3. credentials helped enormously in making our case to fine art museums – or at least in getting in the door - but still cracking this nut proved very difficult. The Ninth National Exhibition at the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore in 1989 furthered our cause but it and the Tenth National in the R. J. Schaefer Gallery at the Mystic Seaport Museum in 1992 could be dismissed by the hardliners as still serving genre art. Thus, many kudos were earned and given when William T. C. Stevens first took us across the bar and obtained the Frye Art Museum in Seattle for our Eleventh National. The significance of this grows in time for it opened the much larger and more important world of the public to the Society. Peter Egeli and his wife Stu, who were so instrumental in getting the Maryland Historical Society venue, worked with Robert Semler to bring in the Cummer Museum and Gardens of Jacksonville, FL at the same time, thereby enabling the Society to celebrate double firsts: Two fine art museum venues and the first traveling National Exhibition.

Bill Semler and Peter Egeli contributed greatly to the Society. Few would guess that the soft spoken, mild mannered Peter is a trained killer (Marine) but few who know this warm and delightful couple have any doubt as to the importance of Stu in Peter's endeavors in the Society. Peter attended the "Constitution Convention" in 1978 and returned to his removed West Bank paradise on the lower Western shores of the Chesapeake Bay with voices still ringing in his ears. Although he received letters to continue in the Society, it was only Stu who persuaded him to do so. Joining the Board in 1982, Peter served as President from 1986 to 1989 and remained on the Board until 1997 – a long run of service, indeed. President Richard D. Moore drafted him back into service in November, 2002 to serve on the Special Committee (discussed below) whose work continues as this is written.

William T. C. Stevens from Seattle joined the Board in 1990, rose to Vice President in 1992 and served as President from 1993 to 1995. An artist coming from a banking background, he was quick to come to the rescue of the Society when he stepped in as Treasurer in 2000 to deal with some cash flow problems and to improve the treasury management information system to prevent such from happening again in the future. Like some others in our history, he did not hesitate to provide his own financial resources in that time of need but, like the others, we never heard anything about it. So it is not surprising that the Society presented these two leaders with its Iron Man Award. Bill was honored at the Annual Meeting in 1997 and Peter at the Annual Meeting in 2002.

Following the Frey and Cummer Museum breakthrough, the Society has been able to continue with fine art museum venues. In the spring of 2001 the 12th National opened at the Cape Museum of Fine Arts and traveled in the fall to the Riverfront Arts Center in Wilmington, DE where a satellite exhibition of ASMA art occurred simultaneously in the Delaware Art Museum Downtown Gallery. Like the Frye/Cummer Exhibition, a full color catalog memorialized the show. In April of next year, Bill Stevens and Bob Semler have lined up a venue for the 13th National at the Vero Beach Museum in Vero Beach Florida. The search continues, but with each additional notch on the gun, more opportunities are possible.

Communication: From Mimeographed Sheets to the Internet; From B&W to Classy Color

A student of journalism would have a field-day tracing the evolution of the Society's first Newsletters done on mimeographed paper in the late 'Seventies to a more structured and scheduled Newsletter in the 'Eighties to the professional journal that we have today. The same student would be dumbfounded to see that the early tomes were written and typed entirely by the President – a President who had many other responsibilities in running the Society. For instance, I have in front of me, thanks to the brilliant record keeping skills of Stu Egeli, "ASMA Newsletter #3" dated 14 May, 1979 – roughly a year after the Society was incorporated. It probably represented the third missive the new President, Pete Rogers, had sent out since the First Exhibition the previous fall. The document looks like an honor thesis done in his Alma Mater, Harvard: Neatly broken into sections with various reports, requests for action, opportunities for members to exhibit their work, lengthy reports on the activities of individual artists, inquiries, statements of gratitude and appreciation and even a "Final Statement and Projection for the Future." It runs for thirteen pages, single-spaced. When you finish reading it, you feel like you just came out of a three-hour Annual Meeting – or maybe two, three-hour annual meetings!

The tradition continued with James E. Mitchell who took the helm from Peter in 1982. But gradually, the task of putting together the Newsletter fell more and more on the Business Manager and its success relied more and more on participation from the membership. Thus, Ann Rogers was in charge of it until the mid-Eighties when the new Business Manager, Kathryn Coster, took over. Nancy Stiles took it over for a couple of issues when she became Business Manager but was relieved by the arrival of Jack Kennedy who was Editor from 1987 – 1993. Bob Semler came in as Assistant Editor in 1992, rising to Editor in 1994 – a position in which he will oversee the production of this article.

It is reassuring to see that nothing has changed but disappointing at the same time to see repeated in the minutes and in our Newsletters the same plea we still hear today: Please send material! This is YOUR Newsletter, so support it with an article or item of interest! What is amazing is how Bob Semler does this. Having reread every Newsletter page by page from the beginning to the end, my head spins to think of the time and effort Bob puts into this. If the Board were to encourage the recruitment of an Assistant Editor, it would do Bob a great favor and provide some relief to those of us who are concerned about his possible burn out. And to think that he was both Editor and President at the same time – it is no wonder he was awarded the Iron Man Award in 2000!

In the mid-Nineties a Web-committee was formed and drew on the considerable skills and time of Arthur S. Liss, one of our members who was deeply involved in what was then a new field. Michael Killelea and Leonard Mizerek were involved and eventually took charge, with Len now serving as the Chair of that Committee and doing all of the work to maintain it. Since the Internet venue has access to a public vastly greater than any Exhibition venue, the Society uses the site (www.americansocietyofmarineartists.com) to presented to the world our most recent National Exhibition. It is constantly being improved and made more

supportive of the members' endeavors with cross-linking now available to their personal websites and with a Members Gallery in which Artist Members can exhibit their work.

Catalogs of our Exhibitions have been important from the beginning. Even when the Society was only months old and very much still at sea with many important questions and policy matters, that First Annual Exhibition had its catalog. Although B&W, it did have a two-color cover, an elegantly simple presentation of our new logo with the Exhibition date on it. Paragraphs could be written about the individual artists who followed in the footsteps of Mark Greene and William G. Muller when they produced this first catalog but suffice it to say that each time it is done again, an effort is made to improve upon the standards set in the last catalog. A real benchmark was established with the Tenth National Exhibition Catalog, the first full color book. Fortunately, funds and supporters have been found to maintain this tradition with subsequent catalogs, a very important accomplishment for it is with the catalogs of recent Exhibitions that we are able to interest the directors of new museum venues. The two most recent Catalogs are the handy work of Fellow Len Mizerek. He worked in conjunction with the University of Washington Press to produce the Eleventh National but it was Len and his gifted assistant, Lindsay von Werne, who did the exquisite job on the Twelfth National Catalog. You might get the idea that Len is attracted to marking up paper, given this publishing performance and given the record service as Secretary in the Society. He joined the Board and was immediately elected Secretary in 1992, to be relieved by Donald Norris eleven years later. As long as that tour of duty was, he counts himself lucky to have a wife, Carolyn, and a business that saved him from those who attempted during these years to move him up a notch or two to become President.

How Big Is the Horizon?

Recall in the beginning of this essay I called your attention to the fact that in the Coliseum Exhibition, from which our Society sprung, a quarter of the participating artists were born overseas. A good number were Brits. And the Royal Academy of Marine Artists was an established organization that our founders could have affiliated with or modeled themselves after, an easy thing to do given the percentage of foreigners involved. But they did not. And the question of foreign membership was not a topic that received priority attention – although, like just about everything then, when it did, it led to lively discussion.

At one point in the early years when the Society was relying on galleries to mount our Exhibitions or to have exhibitions for the members to exhibit in, considerable attention and expectation was focused on one such undertaking only to find that it was not to be exclusively for ASMA. “Foreign competition was being encouraged in our own market” was the concern. (Remember during this time all of our Exhibitions were for sale shows so this economic aspect was real.) Much heated discussion followed but in the end it was decided (possibly more out of exhaustion than reason) that you had to be an U. S. citizen or resident alien to be a member of the Society. This was a policy matter that was visited from time to time in Board meetings but by and large was left in place. Those who ask to revisit this matter usually have North Americans in mind – artists from Canada and Mexico, rather than Englishmen and Continentals, so in the world of NAFTA, it may well be something the Society will revisit in the future.

Another horizon is domestic. On the one hand we are a national organization and from the beginning, as we saw above, have had a healthy representation from across the country in our membership. This diversity has grown such that by 1990 the Society boasted of members from forty states. On the other hand, and again from the beginning, the Society recognized that, to paraphrase Speaker of the House, Tip O’Neill, “All art is local.” That is, we get our start and build our reputation locally. Our horizons are regional more than national. The reason there was such a strong West Coast presence in our very first Exhibition was because there was a functioning network of artists in the region.

So it is interesting to read the minutes and Newsletters of the early years of the Society and see the recognition of the need to promote regional networking and events, especially exhibitions. Virtually every president championed this and in the 'Eighties Gerard Levey, who served as Secretary from 1986 – 1989, made a great effort to encourage it. In the mid-Eighties there were a half dozen formally recognized regions. In 1987 the number rose to eight; in 1989, nine. In 1990 it rose to ten and then to eleven in 1992. It is not clear what was going on, but clearly there was a regional roll, for number increased to twelve in 1993 where it plateaued until 1996 when they were consolidated into half that number.

Against this background of support and encouragement from the Society's Board, it is insightful to look at where the vibrancy has been found and what characteristics seem to be associated with it. The one common characteristic is some driving force to make it happen. No matter if it is a regional meeting for plein air painting like Len Tantillo arranged recently in the upper Hudson Valley or Mike Killelea did in Brooklyn Heights or if it is a major undertaking like the recent Florida Exhibition, the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts in Hagerstown, MD Region Two Exhibition mounted by Don Norris and Lester Stone, or impressive list of western Exhibitions in Region Five, it takes initiative and effort.

Fortunately, as you track the history of these regional activities, it is evident that they are becoming more frequent. Over the years the North East and the North West have been the most active, each having mounted several Exhibitions. The Southern California area has also been active with its own successful Exhibitions. The West generally seems to be on top of possibilities, perhaps because they are so far removed from us in the rest of the country that they figured they had to make their own world. Whatever the reason, it appears that they have developed an attitude and hit a stride in doing things that is enviable. It may well be that once you are airborne it is easier to fly and once they have seen how to mount these exhibition year after year, it becomes part of life. It is much more difficult to make each exhibition a one-off event, never to be repeated. Perhaps we could have Bill Stevens, Sylvia Waters, Dutch Mostert and the others address us at an Annual Meeting and share with us all their approach.

Growth and Management Transition

It is all in front of us to see but perhaps we are too close or, if we do see it, maybe we don't make much of it. And yet it is a profound change and one that can be – and has on occasion been – divisive and disruptive. This is the final observation to relate that emerges out of taking the longer historical view of our Society.

In the beginning, once the Society had decided to be an organization of artists and run by artists, it was clear that the Fellows were in charge. The majority of the Board was made up of Fellows or, like Peter Egeli, others, and me, made up of artists who had been with the organization from the inception and had lived its history and learned the lessons it taught. This held true through most of the 'Eighties when the Fellows decided to broaden Board participation to involve other talent and experience and to lighten the load that was causing burnout among those Fellows who were devoting an unhealthy amount of time to the Society.

Thus, understandably and as expected, the presence of the Fellows among the Officers and on the Board diminished. By 2002, there were only three Fellows on the Board. Running parallel with this trend was the growth of membership. Again, this was a policy initiated by the Board at a time when the Fellows held sway. Our mission called for us to promote American marine art and what better way than helping marine artists be better at their trade? At one point in the late 'Eighties, Jack Kennedy, the Editor of the Newsletter, advocated that the membership should be at least 2,000. This would enable him to produce a high-class color Newsletter. His motives aside, there was also a recognition that the Society had certain fixed costs and certain established needs to fund (like a quality catalog for the National Exhibitions) so a larger

membership would provide a broader funding base. Advertising was authorized and we found that we were generating at least two dollars in new dues for every one that went into ads. Membership grew steadily from the three hundred plus level in the late 'Eighties to twice that in the mid-Nineties.

The significance of this growth is only partially the new total number of members although that is what understandably caught our attention. Buried out of sight in the new total was the important number that should have had our attention: namely, how many old members remained. Nancy Stiles did a preliminary study of the membership list in 1982 and compared it to the membership list in 1999. She found that only ninety-six of the 210 who were members in 1982 were still members in 1999. (By 1999, the membership had declined from its highs and stood at about 550 – where it pretty much remains today.)

What should concern the Society and the Board is the ratio of old members who know the Society and its history to the new members who do not and, importantly, might misunderstand that the Society does not exist to promote their financial well-being but American marine art and history, as is stated in the first lines of our charter very clearly. Look at the magnitude of the potential problem: only seventeen percent of the members in 1999 had been in the Society seventeen years earlier. Yet it is probably a safe bet that in 1999 most on the Board and most of the Fellows as well assumed that the current membership knew as much about the Society and its history as they did. This probable misreading of the situation led, in my opinion, to the unfortunate loss of four most experienced, energetic and valuable Fellows in 2001: Peter W. Rogers, James E. Mitchell, Victor Mays and Frank Handlen. The Society needs to work on educating its members about the Society and fortunately recently some measures have been taken in that direction.

Richard C. Moore, whose name appears in the very early chronicles of the Society, joined the Board in 1998 and served as President from 2001 to the spring of 2003 when he resigned. Following the loss of the four Fellows he oversaw an amendment to the By-Laws clarifying the authority of the Fellows over artistic matters in the Society. He also named a Special Committee or Committee of Four in November 2002 charged with a thorough examination of some of the remaining matters in the By-Laws that were troubling. The two Fellows and past Presidents on this committee (Peter Egeli and Chris Blossom) and the two Artist Member Trustees (Kim Weiland, now President, and Len Tantillo) have undertaken this important task with an earnest dedication. Not surprisingly they are grappling with the very problems and tensions the growth and management transition situation described above have brought about. It will probably continue as a committee for some time, given the nature of their task. Their work could not be more important for the healthy future of the Society and we are fortunate to be in such competent and experienced hands.

So, in the end, a review of our own history would lead one to be less cynical than those quoted in the opening lines. One would, in fact, probably be more inclined to agree with Harry Truman who stated:

“Men make history and not the other way around. In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skillful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better.”

Acknowledgment: I wish to thank Peter Stanford, Peter W. Rogers, James E. Mitchell and William G. Muller for the considerable amount of time they gave me in phone interviews in recent weeks and for material they provided for me. Fed-Ex is all the richer for the amount of file data, mostly minutes, Newsletters and Exhibition Catalogs that Peter and Stu Egeli and Nancy Stiles have lent to me. I have proposed to Pete Rogers that we help him in any way we can to go through his files of our early history to fill in the considerable gaps in our official records. He gave the prime of his working life to the Society so it is fitting that our records document that for future generations who undertake a more thorough examination of this most interesting American art saga. CRR