

Fifty Years of Renaissance Studies in the Southeast: A History of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference*

We remember here and celebrate fifty years of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference, founded on the campus of Duke University in November of 1943. It is a venerable organization, the second oldest regional Conference in the United States devoted to Renaissance studies. As the Secretary-Treasurer of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference, my subject is an organization of which I have some knowledge; I am therefore aware that my topic poses for me something of a dilemma. There is a strong sense in which the beginnings of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference are belated, and my account of them today under the rubric "Fifty Years of Renaissance Studies in the Southeast" is of necessity a shattering of leaves, with forced fingers rude, before the mellowing year.

This essay represents the second example to my knowledge of a new genre of scholarship in Renaissance studies—the history of a regional Renaissance conference on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary. The originator and "onely begetter" of this genre is Edward Crantz, whose paper "Fifty Years of the New England Renaissance Conference" was delivered at the 1989 meeting of the Renaissance Society of America and

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subsequently published in the winter 1989 issue of *Renaissance Quarterly*.¹ Crantz here establishes some defining conventions of the genre—a certain informality of tone, a reliance for information on a mix of published sources and personal reminiscences, an evocation of founding members, a catalogue of meeting places, an effort to capture for those not familiar with the organization something of its unique flavor, and a disarming modesty about the significance of the tale he tells, in contrast to the greater and more epic narrative of the Renaissance Society of America.

One must know that context to understand my reaction to the discovery that according to Crantz, the New England Renaissance Conference is an invisible, albeit happy, organization with “almost no history.”² Further, it has, according to Crantz, “no dues,” “no secretary, no treasurer, and most of all no minutes.”³ Thus, according to Crantz, it has a “minimum of those institutions that are the basis of history with all its tragedies.”⁴ Indeed, the most telling image of the New England Renaissance Conference offered by Crantz is, in fact, of a small group of sojourners returning from one of its meetings who somehow manage to get lost repeatedly in the town of Arctic, Rhode Island. Crantz notes that when he thinks of his organization, he often imagines “the main street of a small town, poorly lighted, late at night.”⁵

The story I am about to tell is a quite different one. It *is* true that meetings of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference do have their timeless aspects. Ted Huguelet, a former Secretary-Treasurer, described for me our annual gatherings:

We met; we listened to papers; we drank and ate; we listened to madrigals; we left.

All our personal experiences and pleasures we took with us.

One might note here the order of priorities, in which the fact of meeting takes precedence over the hearing of papers, and in which drinking pre-

1. Crantz, 749–59.

2. *Ibid.*, 750.

3. *Ibid.*, 753.

4. *Ibid.*, 750.

5. *Ibid.*, 755.

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cedes eating; but let that pass. More important, in spite of his sense of the timeless in our meetings, Ted is also the author of an earlier history of the Conference, to which I am deeply indebted for information and guidance in these matters. His chronicles of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference acknowledge few signs of divine favor to account for our survival for so long and our vigor as we approach our 50th anniversary.⁷

Unless of course one sees signs of divine intervention in the longevity of Allan Gilbert who, having been one of the co-founders of the organization in 1943, lived to deliver a paper on Milton at the 32nd annual meeting in 1975, and to establish with a substantial monetary contribution the Gilbert Reserve Fund that rescued the conference from a difficult financial situation at that time.

Otherwise, however, the chronicles of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference are lacking in the miraculous but are rich in specifics of names, dates, and places. We have a mailing list; we even rent it out from time to time. And we have certainly had a distinguished roster of officers, a substantial collection of minutes, and a long history of dues payments. We even publish a journal, *Renaissance Papers*, and have done so since the early 1950's. Ours is therefore a quite different organization from the one whose fiftieth anniversary was celebrated by our slightly older and more northern neighbors two years ago. And, in spite of the anxiety felt by our northern colleagues that the trappings of more conventional organization lead to a sense of history that is inevitably tragic, we may say that our history, while not necessarily always a narrative of triumph, is certainly one of romantic, even epic, progress through the world.

Reflecting on these contrasts, I was suddenly put to mind of a fundamental difference between New England and the Southeast. The New England Renaissance Conference reflects and embodies academic culture in New England, which is nurtured by those great universities established as schools of religious instruction by the early settlers of Massachusetts Bay.⁸ New England academic culture is thus essentially Puritan, which as

7. Huguelet, 8-11.

8. Unless anyone think I speak in ignorance of these institutions, let me say that although I am by birth a southerner, I did spend a good bit of time in the late 60's

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Perry Miller taught us is fundamentally a condition that has mind rather than history,⁹ and, as Stanley Fish has come south to teach us, is bound to repeat over and over one story, one narrative, that of falling and forgetting and falling again, of repeatedly finding oneself over and over in the same place.¹⁰ Crantz argues appropriately that the New England Renaissance Conference exists primarily as an idea, residing in a timeless moment of academic interchange, a kind of Renaissance green world, of scholarship or professional meetings conducted in the pastoral mode. His account of the New England Renaissance Conference is thus a work of theory rather than history, and, as Fish has also taught us, theory has no consequences.¹¹

This second installment in the chronicles of the Renaissance Society of America's regional conferences will be quite a different story. For the academic culture of the southeast is not Puritan like that of New England. It is essentially Anglican; that is, it is nurtured by universities deeply concerned about history and tradition and about observing occasions purposefully and getting somewhere by doing good works.¹² Thus, in my view at least, fifty years of organization for the Southeastern Renaissance Conference in this very different academic culture, which have included those structural trappings of organization apparently so disturbing to our northern colleagues—a secretary and minutes, a treasurer and dues, and a sequence of presidents and journal editors—have produced a narrative and a history, and have surely gotten us somewhere, and, just as surely, have had consequences.

So, my tale of a regional conference must be more epic than pastoral, must include history and organizational structure, and must lead us to consequences. I promise a narrative of loss and recovery, the retrieval of origins from the mists of time; the struggle to establish routine; the saga of institutional development; the catalogue of presidents and meeting places;

and early 70's at that New England institution of higher learning nestled in the bend of Massachusetts Avenue two blocks from the Charles River.

9. Miller, 1939; Miller, 1953.

10. Fish, 1971.

11. Fish, 1989.

12. Although, like some southern rhetoric, it can be charged with valuing form over substance.

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the return of the repressed; the journey through Atlanta to Knoxville in the snow; the arrival at Chapel Hill in the springtime. First, the history, then the structure, then the consequences.

The Southeastern Renaissance Conference began on a day late in November on the campus of Duke University in 1943. It owes its origins to several factors—the professional, the institutional, the political, and the personal. By the end of the 1930's, the idea that it would be good to establish organizations to support Renaissance studies had been in the air at scholarly and professional meetings for several years. Leadership to establish such an organization in the southeast came from the faculties in Renaissance literature at Duke University and at the University of North Carolina, and especially from Allan Gilbert and Hardin Craig, two senior Renaissance scholars then in the middle of their careers. Their plans for organization were facilitated by the fact that through the efforts of William Richardson Davie and James Buchanan Duke (operating of course in quite different centuries) these two major research universities were located in central North Carolina within twenty miles of each other, approximating some of the geographic closeness more familiar to academic institutions in the northeast. Finally, the outbreak of World War II in the early 1940's had resulted in the cancellation of meetings of academic societies at both the regional and national levels. Without the confluence of all these factors in the fall of 1943, the Southeastern Renaissance Conference might not have come into being.

The professional background is well sketched in Crantz's essay, and it is a background we do share with our New England colleagues. In the 1930's people doing scholarship in the Renaissance became aware of their work as constituting a subject and decided that organizations of like-minded scholars would prove beneficial. In those early days, according to Leicester Bradner, founder of the New England Renaissance Conference, a future leader in the Southeastern Renaissance Conference had a major role to play. Bradner describes, in his own account of the early days, the importance for all that was to come later of discussions held by the Comparative Literature Group at meetings of the Modern Language Association in the early 1930's. There, says Bradner, "Professor Hardin Craig, whose *Enchanted Glass* (1939) was an early important contribution . . . was always

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a leader in these discussions."¹³ In 1943, it was to be Hardin Craig who chaired the first meeting of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference.

Bradner claims that when Don Cameron Allen read a paper entitled "Desiderata for a Further Study of the Renaissance" at the meeting of the Modern Language Association in 1936 in which he urged the establishment of groups to support Renaissance studies, a real turning point had come. His speech led to the formation in 1937 of a committee of the American Council of Learned Societies, which recommended a year or so later that Renaissance Studies be defined as a field of inquiry and supported by professional organizations.¹⁴

Such was the impetus, says Crantz, for the formation of the Northeastern Renaissance Conference in 1939. In the south, such ideas and images were also in the minds of Renaissance scholars such as Hardin Craig at the University of North Carolina and Allan Gilbert at Duke University, but in the late 1930's they were bodied forth at first not in the form of a separate organization but under the umbrella of an already existing regional association. There was precedent for such a plan. Early gatherings of Renaissance scholars had been under the umbrella of the Comparative Literature Group of the Modern Language Association, in which Hardin Craig had been an active participant. The report above-mentioned of the committee of the American Council of Learned Societies had specifically rejected the formation of another independent group like the Medieval Academy of America.¹⁵ Against this background, it must have at first seemed appropriate to Gilbert and Craig that the right way to proceed with establishing a regional Renaissance organization would be as part of a larger regional association whose meetings they were already attending.

Their plans were revealed in the fall of 1940, only months after the first meeting of the New England Renaissance Conference, at that year's meeting of the South Atlantic Modern Language Association. SAMLA, founded in 1928, had already by the late 1930's become one of the largest and most active of the regional MLA's. Prior to the fall meeting of

13. Braedner, 1954, 3.

14. Crantz, 751.

15. Crantz, 751.

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SAMLA in 1940 (held that year in Chapel Hill), Allan Gilbert proposed in an open letter to the membership of SAMLA the establishment of a Renaissance Discussion Circle, to meet each year during the annual SAMLA convention.¹⁶ In another letter following that meeting, he indicates that his proposal was accepted.¹⁷ The first official meeting of the new Renaissance Discussion Circle was to be held at the 1942 meeting of SAMLA.

Having responded to the national call for organizations of Renaissance scholars in this way, however, Gilbert and his colleagues found their efforts immediately frustrated. A year later, shortly after the SAMLA meeting in 1941, at which further plans for the 1942 meeting of the Renaissance Discussion Circle were formulated,¹⁸ the United States of course found itself drawn into World War II. As a result, meetings of both MLA and SAMLA were for the time being suspended.

But, as Harry K. Russell, the Conference's first Secretary, pointed out in the *South Atlantic Bulletin* of December 1943, Gilbert and his colleagues were not to be denied their Renaissance meeting. His account in the *Bulletin* reports that although "meetings of MLA and SAMLA may be canceled for the duration, . . . a group of Renaissance scholars in central North Carolina recently proved that they need not miss the stimulus of papers and discussion."¹⁹ Their "proof" was the gathering of some thirty faculty and graduate students from Duke University, the University of North Carolina, the Women's College in Greensboro, St. Mary's College, Greensboro College, and Western Carolina College on the campus of Duke University on November 27, 1943, at about the time of year they would have been meeting for SAMLA in the Renaissance Discussion Circle, had meetings of SAMLA not been suspended.

Russell's notes indicate that this meeting was originally intended to be a temporary replacement for the SAMLA meeting; the fact that it took place in November, at SAMLA's regular meeting-time supports the conclusion that Gilbert's proposal for a SAMLA Renaissance Discussion Circle is

16. Gilbert, 1940, 1: 3.

17. Gilbert, 1940, 2: 3, 12.

18. Gilbert, 1941, 2.

19. Russell, 1943, 1-2.

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part of the narrative of founding for the Southeastern Renaissance Conference. The spirit of that gathering in 1943, however, caused its conveners to think in longer terms. When the day was over, chronicles Russell, "those in attendance were confirmed in their belief in the value of such gatherings and convinced that . . . meetings like this not only can substitute for MLA and SAMLA but would be worth continuing after normal conditions have returned."²⁰ A year later, Russell would report that Allan Gilbert opened the second meeting, held on January 27, 1945 on the campus of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, with the comment that "this was not only the second meeting, but, he hoped, the second annual meeting."²¹ Russell's notes a year later simply refer to "the annual meeting of scholars interested in the Renaissance."²²

Thus had begun the sequence of meetings of what was first called the Renaissance Meeting in the Southeast, and was later to become the Southeastern Renaissance Conference. What made this possible in central North Carolina was the presence in close proximity to each other of two major southern universities—Duke University and the University of North Carolina—with strong traditions in Renaissance studies. Also important were the existence of the many other colleges—some of whose names appear in this early account—which then, as now, dotted the Carolina landscape and provided employment for so many graduates of those major institutions and kept them within relatively easy driving distance of Durham and Chapel Hill. The establishment of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference is best understood as a consequence of the persistence of Allan Gilbert at Duke University in getting started a regional Renaissance meeting (he is the Leicester Bradner of our tale), and the willingness of Hardin Craig at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to cooperate with him in this effort. Their goal was to encourage the professional development of the faculties in the Renaissance at these two schools, and also the professional development of their graduate students and their former graduate students, many of whom were now members of the faculty at

20. *Ibid.*, 5.

21. Russell, 1945, 2.

22. Russell, 1946, 13.

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the many, many smaller public and private colleges in North Carolina and adjacent states.

In the ecumenical and cooperative spirit of that first meeting, at a meeting hosted by the Duke faculty, Hardin Craig of the University of North Carolina was elected chairman. Sessions were held in the morning and the afternoon at which a total of fifteen papers were read. That evening the meeting was concluded by a symposium entitled "Approaches to Renaissance Literature." Those familiar with the Southeastern Renaissance Conference will already recognize certain features which, once established, have continued—the structure of the meeting—two sessions, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, with a total of about 15 papers, together with an evening activity. When the meeting at Duke University in 1948 featured entertainment by the Duke Madrigal Singers, the basic structure we have continued to follow was already in place. Last weekend, when we met for our 48th annual meeting, the only difference was that we held the afternoon session first, on Friday afternoon, and the morning session second—on Saturday morning, with our evening session, now become revels and occasions for lighthearted entertainment in the Renaissance manner, bridging the night between the two.

Set on the firm foundation of propitious circumstances, a convivial and collegial atmosphere, strong leadership, and an effective meeting structure, the Conference thus entered its first period of growth and development. During the next twelve years, meetings alternated between the campuses of the University of North Carolina and Duke University. Organization was informal, as were the meetings. A committee was chosen at each year's meeting to make arrangements and choose papers for the next year's sessions. Although the first meeting was held in November of 1943, the second meeting was held in January of 1945, marking a shift in meeting date to later in the year that was encouraged by the resumption of fall meetings of SAML A after the end of World War II. In the later 1940's the date of the annual meeting gradually moved toward the spring, perhaps drawn by the before-mentioned dogwoods and azaleas. It finally achieved stability in 1950, when the meeting was held on April 15. In 1952, the first two-day format for meetings was established, to respond to the need for more travel time as more and more conferees from as far away as

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Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Tennessee, and Kentucky began to make the Southeastern Renaissance part of their professional meeting schedules. So it is that we continue to meet in the springtime in March or April, moving adroitly to avoid conflicting with those great moveable feasts of springtime—Easter, and the meetings of the Renaissance Society of America and the Shakespeare Association of America.

In 1948, Hardin Craig, one of the founding leaders, moved from the University of North Carolina to the University of Missouri, although he continued to return to North Carolina to attend meetings of the Conference for some years. Allan Gilbert continued to provide leadership for the organization; he would do so for over three decades. With the passage of time, however, he was joined in the round of presidents, vice-presidents, secretaries, and treasurers by a host of other scholars at southern universities. The list of people who have made their contributions to the Conference in leadership roles is a long and illustrious one; it has included among others Ernest Talbert, Fredson Bowers, John Lievsay, S. K. Heninger, George Walton Williams, Thomas Wheeler, Carol Carlisle, Ted Huguelet, Norman Sanders, Joan Hartwig, Leigh DeNeef, Jeanne Roberts, Tom Hester, Robert Entzminger, Bob Halli, Frances Teague, and Georgia Christopher.

From its earliest days, sessions of the Conference have regularly featured the work of senior scholars, including over the years C. J. Sisson, George Coffin Taylor, Don Cameron Allen, Douglas Bush, Christopher Hill, and Stanley E. Fish. But it has also provided young scholars the opportunity to begin or develop fledgling careers. In 1950, John Steadman, on his way to the Huntington Library and the University of California, stopped briefly in Chapel Hill, but long enough to serve as Secretary of the Conference. Over the years, papers have been read by a host of scholars in the early years of their careers, including Urban T. Holmes, D. W. Robertson, William B. Hunter, Richmond P. Bond, J. Max Patrick, Louis Marder, Mary Ellen Rickey, Lester A. Beaurline, David Bevington, Richard Marius, David Bergeron, Michael Lieb, Arthur Kinney, David Miller, and Annabel Patterson. This tradition continues; the program at our 48th annual meeting included the work of several graduate students and younger scholars whose work, with time, should bring them the acclaim now accorded their illustrious predecessors.

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The early years of the Conference saw it thrive in its central North Carolina location, as it moved its site of meeting back and forth between Durham and Chapel Hill. Attendance at the annual meetings grew from the low 30's in 1943 to the low 70's by the end of the decade, and reached the century figure not many years later. Soon the Conference became truly regional, its meetings attended by scholars from institutions in neighboring states, rather than just neighboring counties. Before the end of the decade, scholars from the University of South Carolina, the University of Florida, Emory University, the University of Alabama, and even a New England visitor, William Peery from Mount Holyoke College, had papers on the program. More recently, international visitors from Canada and England and scholars from the more far-flung parts of the United States have joined regional scholars on our programs.

The early years of the 1950's brought further signs of transition and development. In 1953 and 1954, members of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference met in New York with members of the Northeastern Renaissance Conference and other regional Renaissance groups to form the Renaissance Society of America. On January 31, 1953, W. L. Wiley of the Department of French at The University of North Carolina, representing the Southeastern Renaissance Conference, met with other members of the American Committee on Renaissance Studies at Columbia University. At that meeting the organization of the Renaissance Society of America was proposed.²³ A year later, on January 30, 1954, the Renaissance Society of America was officially established, with Wiley from the University of North Carolina and Allan Gilbert from Duke University serving as the Southeastern Renaissance Conference's representatives on the original Advisory Council.²⁴ From that time, the Southeastern Renaissance Conference has been a regional conference of the Renaissance Society of America, its executive secretary has served on the Renaissance Society of America's Advisory Council, and it has been pleased to cooperate with the Renaissance Society of America in many endeavors.

But 1954 is also significant in the history of the Southeastern Renais-

23. Board, 1954, 7.

24. Board, 9.

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sance Conference because that year, under the leadership of Allan Gilbert and Hennig Cohen, the conference founded *Renaissance Papers* as a journal to contain a selection of papers read at the annual meeting.²⁵ The first editors were Gilbert and Cohen; their successors have included S. K. Heninger, Peter Phialas, Dennis Donovan, Leigh DeNeef, Tom Hester, Dale Randall, Joe Porter, Barbara Baines, and just now taking over for a second stint, George Williams. Thus the plans of Gilbert and Cohen continue to bear fruit; in fact, *Renaissance Papers 1990* is just out, and *Renaissance Papers 1991* will be along next year.

Yet even greater changes were in the offing. After 12 years of shuttling back and forth between Durham and Chapel Hill, the Conference ventured into a larger world, both geographically and organizationally, when it held its annual meeting in 1956 at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. At this 13th annual meeting, perhaps inspired by the formal organization of the Renaissance Society of America two years earlier, perhaps emboldened by the discovery that there were universities in the southeast other than those in North Carolina, perhaps aware that to support a journal the Conference needed a more formal structure, the Conference at the meeting in South Carolina voted to organize itself formally with officers, dues, a mailing list, and a pledge to support *Renaissance Papers*.²⁶ Appropriately, Allan Gilbert was elected the first president, to preside over the 1957 meeting, and W. L. Wiley, Gilbert's partner on the Advisory Council of the Renaissance Society of America was elected the first vice-president.

After this first invigorating venture outside of North Carolina, the Conference returned to Duke University in 1957 and to the University of North Carolina in 1958 before going on the road once more, again visiting the University of South Carolina in 1959 and accepting the invitation of newly-elected President Fredson Bowers to meet at the University of Virginia in 1960. In the decade of the 1960's, the Conference wandered even further from its site of origin, meeting only once at the University of North

25. Huguelet, 2-3.

26. Huguelet, 2. This is of course, the point at which our colleagues of the New England Renaissance Conference would claim that we took the fatal turn which would inevitably lead us to ruin.

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Carolina (in 1963) and twice at Duke University (in 1961 and 1966), interspersed with meetings at Columbia College (1962 and 1965, co-hosting with the University of South Carolina), the University of Florida (1964), the University of Tennessee (1967), Wake Forest University (1968), and a return to the University of Virginia (1969).

In the 1970's, the pattern of meeting achieved a higher level of organization. Founding hosts Duke University and the University of North Carolina joined the University of South Carolina in agreeing to host the Conference in even-numbered years, while the Conference agreed to accept invitations from other institutions in the southeast in odd-numbered years. At a meeting in Raleigh in 1978 it was agreed that North Carolina State University would join the roster of permanent host institutions, bringing that number to four. Thus the Conference has met at Duke University in 1980 and 1988, at the University of North Carolina in 1982 and 1990, at North Carolina State University in 1986, and at the University of South Carolina in 1984; we will meet again at the University of South Carolina next year in 1992.

Odd-year wanderings have taken us to the Virginia Military Institute in 1975, the University of Virginia in 1983, and to Old Dominion University in 1991, to the University of Kentucky in 1973 and 1989, to the University of Tennessee in 1987, to the Georgia Institute of Technology in 1981 and to the University of Georgia in 1985, to Clemson University in 1971, to the Folger Shakespeare Library in 1977, and to the University of Alabama in 1979. Special mention needs to be made of the Virginia meeting in 1983 and the Tennessee meeting in 1987, when uncharacteristically southern spring snow storms made travel more difficult and challenging. In 1987, half the conference was trapped for hours in the Atlanta airport, trying to get to Knoxville and making it only after a several-hour delay.

This branching-out from the North Carolina base of the organization reflects the development of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference from its origins as an informal gathering of the current and former students of Allan Gilbert and Hardin Craig who wanted to revisit Chapel Hill and Duke Gardens in the springtime into a truly regional organization that serves a membership of nearly four hundred people. While our largest concentration of members remains in North Carolina, our second-largest contingent of members is from Georgia, with Virginia, South Carolina,

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Kentucky, the District of Columbia, and Tennessee close behind. We certainly retain our regional identity, but in fact our total membership includes residents of thirty-four states, Canada, and England. Our journal, *Renaissance Papers*, received by all members, is now subscribed to by over 150 American libraries and by foreign libraries as far flung as England, France, New Zealand, Africa, and Australia.

So much for history; what about consequences? I believe that in large and small ways the history and development of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference have had consequences for Renaissance studies in this region and on a larger, national scale, both on the institutional and on the personal level. Close to home, for example, my colleague M. Thomas Hester at North Carolina State University moved directly from a period as co-editor of *Renaissance Papers* and a term as president of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference to the founding of *John Donne Journal* and the establishment of the John Donne Society.²⁷ I am sure others in the region could tell similar tales of ways in which experience with the activities of this Conference helped prepare them for other professional activities.

On an institutional level, the record is also fascinating. Obviously the Conference owes its existence and many features of its development to the close proximity of the University of North Carolina and Duke University, and the willingness of these institutions to cooperate in scholarly ventures. The success of such inter-institutional cooperation between these two universities emboldened them to undertake other joint activities, most notably, in the 1960's and 1970's, the Duke-UNC Cooperative Program in the Humanities. Allan Gilbert and Hardin Craig started the Southeastern Renaissance Conference; their success provided the inspiration and the Conference's membership on the faculties of these two universities provided much of the leadership for the establishment of this cooperative program, which brought faculty members of smaller colleges and universities in North Carolina to the campuses of Duke and the University of North Carolina for periods of research and study.²⁸

27. Personal conversation, spring 1991.

28. Personal conversation with George W. Williams and S. K. Heninger, Spring 1991.

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One of the products of this Cooperative Program was the creation of the Southeastern Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Funded by a Ford Foundation grant, the Southeastern Institute functioned during the summer months of the late 1960's and 1970's; it brought distinguished senior scholars from across the country to lead seminars in medieval and renaissance studies for advanced graduate students and younger professionals. Like the Southeastern Renaissance Conference in the early days, this Institute was hosted by the two campuses in turn. Major papers by the senior scholars in residence each summer were published in an annual volume, again drawing on the model of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference.

The Southeastern Institute for Medieval and Renaissance Studies is, sadly, no longer with us, but O. B. Hardison told me last summer that it lives on in more than one way.²⁹ It provided the model for the Folger Institute for Renaissance and Eighteenth-Century Studies which he created when he moved from the Department of English at the University of North Carolina to become Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library in 1969. The Southeastern Institute also provided a model for the summer institutes now organized and funded each year by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

An event on a more local level, but again with national consequences, is the fact that Morton Bloomfield of Harvard University came to North Carolina in the summer of 1975 as one of the senior scholars for that summer's Southeastern Institute of Medieval and Renaissance Studies. That is a detail of no more than ordinary interest, except for the fact that Morton Bloomfield was then on a committee of the American Council of Learned Societies (an organization whose promotion of scholarly organizations also figured at the beginning of our story) which at the time was looking for a site for a proposed national center for advanced study in the humanities. In large measure, Bloomfield's experiences that summer in North Carolina, including his impressions of the resources available for research in the humanities in what by then had become the Research Triangle, and the relationships he developed with the faculty and admin-

29. Personal correspondence, summer 1990.

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istrators of Duke University, the University of North Carolina, and North Carolina State University led directly to the establishment of the National Humanities Center in the midst of the Research Triangle Park.

But here I may be making larger claims for the consequences of the founding of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference some 48 years ago than the historical record will bear. Perhaps we are now in the realm of myth and legend. So let it be sufficient to claim that the scholarly and academic culture of the southeast has changed dramatically in the last fifty years, and that the Southeastern Renaissance Conference has played a significant role in that development. At the end of the first meeting in 1943, in the midst of a major world war, the Conference's first secretary wrote that some in attendance said that the meeting was proof that "energy and resourcefulness can overcome present obstacles," and that it would be "worth continuing after normal conditions (meaning meetings of MLA and SAMLA) have returned." And so it was continued, and so it has proved worthy. Growing from an informal gathering of thirty to an organization over ten times that size, through 48 annual meetings at which scholarly careers have begun, developed, and flourished, through the nurturing of countless friendships and associations that now link the Renaissance faculties in the colleges and universities of the southeast, the Conference has fulfilled and exceeded the dreams and aspirations of its founders.

Perhaps its greatest contribution has been the way in which it has taught many of us to understand what is meant by a community of scholars. This in itself is no small accomplishment, given the challenges we face in bringing scholars together. The southeast is in fact a vast region of the country, encompassing ten states. North Carolina alone is bigger than all of New England. Our centers of learning are often not in densely populated areas and are separated from each other by miles of highway and hours of flight time. But, over the years, the meetings of the Southeastern Renaissance Conference as they have moved about the region and periodically returned to their place of origin in central North Carolina, have provided scholars in our area with a point of reference, a common meeting-ground, an occasion to renew old acquaintances and make new ones, to welcome new folk to the area and to say good by to those moving on.

In addition, it has provided leadership and support for other activities

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supportive of Renaissance studies in the southeast. After World War II was over, and meetings of SAMLA resumed, Allan Gilbert's first idea for bringing Renaissance scholars together—the Renaissance Discussion Circle—also began anew (thus constituting the return of the repressed I promised earlier). Leadership for that Renaissance meeting and for the Southeastern Renaissance Conference usually overlap, and the rhythm of SAMLA in the fall and the Southeastern Renaissance Conference in the spring structures the professional lives of many of us.

So let this be our most enduring contribution, and the most important work we must maintain as we contemplate our future—that we have enabled the building of a sense of community among Renaissance scholars in the southeast, that we have provided a forum for the presentation of our work, and an occasion for the development of our relationships, and thus have furthered the work each of us has found important to do in our lives. This constitutes a not inconsiderable achievement, one we are pleased to report to the Renaissance Society of America as we celebrate the first fifty years of our history.

North Carolina State University

John N. Wall