

**Cite this article:** David Sokol, response to “Who Will We Be? The Association of Historians of American Art on its Fortieth Anniversary,” ed. Louise Siddons and Jeffrey Richmond-Moll, *Panorama: Journal of the Association of Historians of American Art* 6, no. 2 (Fall 2020), <https://doi.org/10.24926/24716839.11030>.

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When I entered the Institute of Fine Arts in January 1963, I was interested in pursuing a museum career in the field of Italian Renaissance Art, so I was assigned Professor H. W. Janson as my advisor. I had little awareness of American art, other than some contemporary painting and the work of the big three: Eakins, Homer, and Ryder. However, the fiftieth anniversary celebration and recreation of much of the 1913 Armory Show in my first semester at the IFA certainly broadened my horizons. While taking a course in Rembrandt's prints with A. Hyatt Mayer at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, I walked through the recently rehung American art galleries and saw a painting by John Quidor. Intrigued, I looked in the libraries at the museum, and at the IFA, only discovering one catalogue on the artist, written by John Baur for the Brooklyn Museum in 1942.

There was nobody teaching any American art at the IFA, and Professor Janson pointed out that there were very few courses on the subject at any advanced graduate program in the country. Indeed, at the IFA, Wanda Corn, Patricia Hills, William Talbot, Maybelle Mann, and I began work in the field through the 1960s, with the help of our advisors and little in the way of coursework. I ended up writing a master's paper on Quidor and, after much discussion with Professors Janson and Robert Goldwater, began looking for a doctoral program where I could emphasize American art.

Nothing seemed promising, and I ended up taking a position teaching at a community college in New York and registering for a Ph.D. in the interdisciplinary program in American Civilization at NYU. I took courses in American Literature and History, and some reading courses on American architecture with Professor Goldwater. I wrote my dissertation on Quidor's life and work, with Professor Janson as my advisor and Professor Goldwater as my second reader. Professor Paul Baker from the History Department was the third reader.

I moved to Illinois in 1968, taught and wrote, and became the chair of the Art History Department at University of Illinois at Chicago in 1977. I participated in CAA and American Studies Association conferences, where there were occasional sessions and scattered talks on American art.

Wayne Craven and I had gotten used to smoking our pipes in the lobbies of the conference hotels, and other people were starting to talk about trying to develop some kind of affinity group for the small but growing group of Americanists, when the CAA program folks approved a session for the 1979 conference, “Individual Works of American Art,” chaired by John Wilmerding.

We'd requested the use of the room after the session, and our first unofficial AHAA meeting was held. We decided to meet each year at the CAA meetings, to develop additional sessions on American Art, and to distribute information.

Perhaps because I was a sitting chair, with access to a secretary and the “low-tech” accessory of a mimeograph machine, I became the coordinator, with colleagues in both universities and museums sending information about exhibitions, publications, etc. My department printed up the newsletter and mailed it out on a regular basis. My office continued to do that, even after I stopped chairing my department in 1984.

As I had two more-or-less full-time positions in the early 1980s, at UIC and the Terra Museum of American Art, and as American art was flourishing at the University of Delaware, William Homer took over the role of coordinator. The torch was passed, and it moved on to others over the years, but the early meetings, the comradery, and the efforts to get attention and respect for the art of our own country remain an important part of my professional memory.