

Report of the Secretary to the North American Vexillological Association

October 18, 2015

The duties of the Secretary, according to the bylaws, include delivery to the members of the Notice of the Annual Meeting and of special meetings, keeping of the seal, sending reminders of dues, and recording the minutes of annual, special, and executive board meetings. By custom, the secretary also maintains correspondence with parties outside the association, keeps the membership roll, and chairs the membership committee.

My largest challenge this year has been due to my failure to apprehend the customary duties of the office. I was prepared to take on the statutory duties, but pressing professional obligations meant that I was not able to devote as much attention to the membership-related matters as I should have. For this reason, I heartily endorse the proposed amendments to the bylaws which will make clearer to any prospective officers the scope of their duties before they take on an office.

This year, there has been little correspondence with the Association, other than membership-related matters. We continue to receive publications from our sister vexillological associations overseas, and I have inquired with the Dolph Briscoe Center to ask whether they would like to receive those publications to add to the Whitney Smith Flag Research Center Collection. I have faithfully taken minutes, and sent *Semaphore* announcements and the Notice of the Annual Meeting as required. As there has been no objection to my performance of those duties, I trust it has been satisfactory. With the approval of the president, I initiated the printing and mailing of electronic publications and announcements to those NAVA members who do not have e-mail addresses.

The great challenge of 2015 was obtaining membership renewals. Few members renewed in 2014, for various reasons. It was a great pleasure to work with the Membership Committee to spur renewals. Vanessa van de Putte, Catherine Wright, and Ted Kaye each provided invaluable assistance in this work.

We undertook the following activities to encourage renewals.

- Membership Committee members called by telephone on all NAVA members without email addresses on file. We obtained emails for about half of them, making it easier to communicate with them on all association matters, especially renewals.
- Once the new website and its renewal function went online in March, I sent three separate *Semaphore* emails to alert members to renew through the Philosophy Documentation Center (PDC), which now handles our membership payments. The language of the email varied according to the most recent date of renewal, which dictated the actions needed to renew with PDC. The *Semaphore* messages explaining the renewal process resulted in a

43% renewal rate (current members compared to 2013, the last year for which complete figures were recorded).

- To boost the renewal rate, Vanessa van de Putte and Catherine Wright sent reminder emails, directing members to call PDC directly – and also promoting the Ottawa meeting.
- Ted Kaye called non-renewing members who lacked emails and encouraged them to renew.
- I also sent letters by surface mail to all non-renewing members, encouraging them to call PDC to renew their memberships, and to attend the Ottawa meeting.

These efforts have boosted the renewal rate to 64%, and renewals continue to trickle in. While the loss of so many members is regrettable, I am grateful to the Membership Committee for all they have done to bring so many members back into the association.

As we have become aware of renewing members, I have personally sent a thank-you email to each member. The letters served a dual purpose of cultivating positive feelings about membership and attempting to pique interest in the Ottawa meeting.

To encourage new memberships, I engaged in two outreach campaigns. There are two Facebook groups dedicated to flags and vexillology, and I invited their members to join NAVA. I did not track whether this produced new memberships. Second, I identified several dozen scholars who published works on flags in non-vexillological journals. I sent personalized emails to each of them. To date, this effort has not produced any new memberships, but perhaps it has raised awareness of our association.

We are fortunate, however, to have 61 new members this year. Flags have been in the news this year, and many NAVA members provided their expertise to journalists and were sure to mention NAVA in their remarks. I believe this has been influential in the decision of so many to join the association. The thoughtfulness of NAVA members in this regard has been a boon to our membership rolls, and I am deeply grateful for their conscientiousness.

As of October 1, 2015, non-institutional membership stands at slightly over 300. Treasurer Bedwell reports that this is close to the average for the last ten years.

For each of the 61 new members, I have sent a welcome packet containing a lapel pin, a 3x5” association flag, and several back issues of *Raven* or *Flag Research Quarterly*. The cover letter also promoted the Ottawa meeting. Along with a large number of back issues of electronic publications printed and mailed, these welcome packets account for our larger than usual postage costs this year.

The other major project I engaged in was populating the member database behind the updated NAVA.org website. All members must be added individually to the database in order for them to have access to the “Members Only” area. Adding all the members to the database consumed most of two days.

Because our relationship with PDC is new, we had to develop workflows around new memberships and renewals to accommodate communications from PDC. To prepare for the transition to a new Secretary, I have outlined the workflows and timing of the Secretary's duties in the new environment. I hope the new incumbent will find it an easier year than I did, and I wish her much success.

As I mentioned, I was not prepared this year to spend all the time that I should have on membership matters. I would suggest two projects that might be useful in the future. One is a study of members who failed to renew, to learn what could have kept them in the organization. Anecdotal evidence exists, but not in a large enough sample to make accurate judgments. Second is a more thorough outreach to people we know to be interested in flags – through their Facebook affiliations, participation in Flags of the World, and other activities – but who are not yet NAVA members.

I leave with one last thought regarding NAVA membership figures. With our bumper crop of new members, we have a chance to make a good first impression and possibly retain them for many years. It is crucial that the organization provide the benefits which the members expect, in a timely manner, for the new members to find value in our association.

Respectfully,

Steven A. Knowlton