



President's Report
ASOR Board of Trustees
April 6, 2019

Yet Again, It's All About Location, Location, Location

Location, I: Moving Out of Boston. As strange as it may seem, as of December 31, 2018, after more than 22 years, ASOR no longer has a physical presence in Boston. Or, to be more specific, ASOR no longer has office space in Boston. We do still have some boxes and furniture stored in Boston, pending our move into our new office space in Alexandria (more on this below), and two of our Boston staff members, Cynthia Rufo, continues to work half-time for ASOR from her home, managing things such as the weekly publication of *The ANE Today*, the biweekly publication of *News@ASOR*, as well as helping to support the work of ASOR Cultural Heritage Initiatives. A second member of our Boston staff, Inda Omerefendic, is also working from home as a half-time employee on a month-by-month basis. The third remaining member of our Boston staff, Financial Specialist Britta Abeln, works for us remotely as well, but from her new home (as of January 1, 2019) in Los Angeles. Britta has responsibility for many aspects of ASOR's day-to-day financial operations: she pays bills and tracks budgetary spending, assists with the payroll, and works with the Executive Director Andy Vaughn to prepare periodic financial reports for the Board Finance Committee.

Location, II: Our New Home in Alexandria. It's really happening! More specifically: after being authorized by the Board in our January 7, 2019, conference call to go forward with the purchase for 1.1 million dollars of 209 Commerce Street in Alexandria, Virginia, and to work together with Finance Committee in coordination with Building Campaign Cabinet to negotiate a finance model based on a 30-50% equity line of credit or comparable mortgage product, we started all the relevant wheels in motion. We executed a purchase-and-sale agreement, secured the equity line of credit, had a building inspection and a radon test, as well as a survey and title search. Everything has gone very, very smoothly: there have been

no major procedural glitches, and (more important) all the various inspections and surveys uncovered no major problems.

Closing date is April 24, 2019, which is a later than we wanted (we are due to vacate our temporary quarters at Virginia Theological Seminary on March 31, 2019); unfortunately, though, the sellers were unable to move to their new premises before the April 24th date. The sellers, though, worked hard to accommodate our needs by making available to us three vacant offices on the second floor of 209 Commerce Street, and we began moving into those offices the week of March 18th. Yet while we won't have a "fully ASOR space" to show the Board at our reception on April 5th, we still look forward to showing you all the building!

We also look forward to "bringing home" our building funding campaign. As the Board knows, this campaign has been enormously successful. We received our first donation only 14 months ago, in late January 2018, yet as of April 1, 2019, we will have received cash donations of approximately \$472,000 and pledges of approximately \$600,000. We also received, in February, an additional and extraordinarily generous pledge of \$450,000 that is conditional to a 2:1 match: i.e., for every \$2 of the pledge, we need to raise \$1 (or \$225,000 total). So far, we have done exceptional work in meeting this challenge, as we have already raised \$144,000 in the two months since the challenge was announced. Nevertheless, we need *everyone's help* in raising the last \$81,000 -- both help from our Board in terms of your own donations and help from our Board in identifying other possible donors. If we can raise this last \$82,000, that will bring our total fund-raising up to \$1.6 million, enough both to buy the building, pay financing, inspection, and closing costs, and to establish a \$450,000 endowment (with a \$22,500/year payout) to cover building maintenance and annual operating expenses.

Last, but by no means least, I am thrilled to announce that, at the request of the extremely generous anonymous donor who has taken the lead in contributing to our building fund, ASOR's new home will be named in honor of our late Board colleague, James Francis Strange. I am writing this report on March 29th, just a little more than a year after Jim's death, on March 23, 2018, and it is deeply gratifying to me to know that ASOR is able to mark the anniversary of Jim's passing with such a permanent and significant memorial. Even more so, it is gratifying to think how appropriate it is for ASOR to memorialize Jim in this way, as it was Jim who, during what it turned out would be his last ASOR Board meeting, most passionately championed ASOR "making the leap" to buy a building, even as we all acknowledged it was an enormous and even scary step. A year later, as we celebrate all the successes that have brought us to our new home at 209 Commerce Street, we thank Jim and what his expression of confidence in our organization has made possible.

Location III: The Annual Meeting. We continue to wrestle with the issue of the time and place of the ASOR meeting and, more specifically, the viability of continuing to meet in the same city and in the same week as SBL. The problem is that the reunited AAR and SBL, and their convention management group, have essentially forced ASOR out of the centers of the cities where the meetings are being held. That meant we were in Buckhead in 2015, while AAR-SBL was in downtown Atlanta; we were in a suburban resort in San Antonio in 2016, while AAR-SBL was downtown; in 2017, we were at the waterfront Westin in Boston, while AAR-SBL was downtown at the Hynes Convention Center; and we were at the Denver Tech Park in 2018, while AAR-SBL was in downtown Denver.

Going forward, we will continue to face challenges, at least in some years. We are fine for 2019, when we will be at the Westin San Diego, a fifteen-minute walk (in warm, sunny San Diego!) from the AAR-SBL meeting, and in 2020, we will be back at the Westin Waterfront Hotel in Boston, the site (by far) of our most successful meeting ever (1148 attendees; the next closest attendee total is 936, at the aforementioned Westin San Diego in 2014).¹ But we face problems again in 2021, as well as in other years going forward. For your information, the AAR-SBL meeting schedule through 2031 is as follows:

2021: San Antonio
2022: Denver
2023: San Antonio
2024: San Diego
2025: Boston
2026: Denver
2027: Washington, DC
2028: Boston

¹ ASOR Annual Meeting Attendees, 2009-2018

2009: New Orleans	601 (SBL separate from AAR; ASOR and SBL hotels were a 4 minute walk apart)
2010: Atlanta	686 (SBL separate from AAR; ASOR and SBL hotels were a 6 minute walk apart)
2011: San Francisco	816 (SBL rejoined AAR; ASOR and SBL hotels were a 5 minute walk apart)
2012: Chicago	921 (SBL rejoined AAR; ASOR hotel and SBL convention center were a 9 minute drive [3.6 miles] apart)
2013: Baltimore	932 (SBL rejoined AAR; ASOR hotel and SBL convention center were a 6 minute walk apart)
2014: San Diego	936 (SBL rejoined AAR; ASOR hotel and SBL convention center were a 15 minute walk apart)
2015: Atlanta	877 (SBL rejoined AAR; ASOR hotel and SBL hotels were a 17 minute drive [7.5 miles] apart)
2016: San Antonio	881 (SBL rejoined AAR; ASOR hotel and SBL convention center were a 36 minute drive [21.7 miles] apart)
2017: Boston	1148 (SBL rejoined AAR; ASOR hotel and SBL convention center were an 18 minute drive [3.5 miles] apart)
2018: Denver	807 (SBL rejoined AAR; ASOR hotel and SBL convention center were a 20 minute drive [13.2 miles] apart)

2029: San Antonio
2030: San Diego
2031: Washington, DC

Note especially the 2021, 2022, 2023 meetings, and the challenges they present. Despite what have been truly herculean efforts on the part of Arlene Press, our Director of Meetings and Events, we have been unable to find anything that is workable in San Antonio for 2021, and while we almost certainly could get a contract to return to the Denver Marriott Tech Center in 2022, this is not something I can recommend to the Board as a viable option. Attendance at the 2018 Denver meeting was 807, the lowest number of attendees at an ASOR meeting since 2010 (Atlanta; 686) and 341 fewer attendees than we had in Boston a year earlier, in 2017. That said, the staff did "count" attendees in Denver a little differently than in previous years, as they culled from the registration count everyone who had registered but did not attend. So the comparison is not exactly "apples to apples."

Nevertheless, the Denver Tech Park does not seem to serve our members well, nor did the meeting in Denver serve ASOR well financially (and I remind the Board that we as a body have fiduciary responsibility for the organization). More specifically: while the Annual Meeting always operates at a loss (which we make up for with revenue from other areas), our loss in Boston in 2017, according to FY 2018 Audit, was only \$8688, whereas the loss in San Antonio in 2016 (881 attendees) was \$35,333. This suggests that for Denver (807 attendees), we must anticipate a loss somewhere in the range of \$40,000 or more.

The Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Annual Meeting has been working diligently to develop recommendations regarding a way forward for the Board's consideration. Many of you will remember, for example, that this committee conducted an all-member discussion on Thursday of the 2018 Annual Meeting, to allow members to present their views and discuss issues and options. The committee also developed a preliminary report for the Executive Committee to review at its retreat during the weekend of February 2-3, 2019, and the Ad Hoc Committee Chair, Gary Arbino, joined the Executive Committee to discuss those preliminary considerations. Most notably, the committee conducted a member-wide survey on the future of the Annual Meeting in February, and although the survey was long -- 21 questions -- about 580 people (more than 1/3 of the ASOR membership) responded. That's an extraordinary response rate, and while it took the committee a while to assimilate all the data, the results have now been published in both summary form and as a full data set at <http://www.asor.org/news/2019/3/am-survey-results>. The committee has also prepared a comprehensive report for the Board that includes the survey results as well as a wealth of other data, and discussion of this report -- and a decision on how to move forward -- will be the major agenda item for our April 6, 2019, Board meeting.

It remains only for me to thank the members of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Future of the Annual Meeting for their extremely hard work. They are Gary Arbino (Chair), Kent Bramlett, William Caraher, Sidnie White Crawford, Erin Darby, Karen Rubinson, and Eric Welch. I know (because I am on the e-mail chain) that they have performed over and beyond the call of duty, and we on the Board all owe them our deepest gratitude for everything they have done to make sure we can make the best informed decision possible.