

Report by the Secretary on SESAH's 2019 Annual Conference in Greenville, SC, October 10-12, 2019

Lydia M Soo, University of Michigan, SESAH secretary (3 November 2019)

SESAH met in Greenville, South Carolina, for its most recent “family reunion,” as past president Gigi Price has called its annual conference. Although locals were hoping that their drought would end, the rains held off until Sunday, giving us three days of glorious 70 degree weather in this charming and thriving city tucked into the foothills of the central Appalachian mountains. The meeting was held at the Hyatt Regency on Main Street, a location that enabled SESAHers to easily take a break from its signature atrium and sealed environment out into Greenville’s historic downtown. Beginning in the 1980s, it was revitalized through the efforts of mayor Max Heller and landscape architect Laurence Halprin. Now famous as a walkable city, a stroll south--past shops, restaurants, and concert venues--takes you to the picturesque Reedy River waterfalls, once hidden by a concrete bridge but now the centerpiece of Falls Park. This park, which includes a variety of amenities along the river, forms part of the Swamp Rabbit Trail, a twenty mile walking and bicycle path connecting Greenville to its neighbors. There are signs, however, of the downside to Greenville’s success--large multi-story condos are under construction and will soon loom over the park and the falls.

The conference, held on Thursday and Friday, began with a welcome from Robbie Jones, president, and the local conference chairs, Peter Laurence and Andreea Mihalache, faculty from nearby Clemson College, which supported this meeting. These two days were busy, each offering four groups of four simultaneous sessions, reflecting the size of this conference: with almost 140 registrations, it was the second largest meeting in SESAH history. Attendees had the opportunity to hear papers on a wide variety of themes relating to architectural history, theory, and preservation, ranging from the early modern period to the present. New additions to the typical conference schedule included sessions devoted to a curator’s talk on two local house museums and an artist’s talk on her photographic work. The University of South Carolina Press and University of North Carolina Press also had book display tables. SESAH provided good coffee and snacks in between sessions to keep attendees fortified for the final event of that day, the keynote address by historian and critic Sarah Williams Goldhagen, entitled “The Next Environmental Revolution.” In it she argued that design decisions based on intuition, common sense, and experience are insufficient for creating healthy and beautiful buildings and cities, and need to be verified and supplemented by cognitive science research. The first day of the conference ended with a reception, where SESAH once again lived up to its reputation for generous offerings of excellent food.

On Friday, the conference continued with its robust schedule of simultaneous sessions, with breaks for coffee and also the SESAH Lunch and Business Meeting. President and Treasurer Robbie Jones led the way in attending to business, followed by Vice President Jennifer Baughn, Secretary Lydia Soo, and Vice President Elect Lydia Brandt. Lydia Brandt filled in membership about a particularly important development over the last year: an agreement that the University of North Carolina Press will now publish ARRIS, SESAH’s peer-reviewed journal. This partnership has already begun with ARRIS 29, edited by Al Willis and Gigi Price, which will be mailed to members in November.

One highlight of the business meeting is always the awards presentations. This year, the following awards were given:

SAH Annual International Conference Fellowship to Nicholas Serrano, assistant professor at Louisiana State University, who presented his paper at the Society of Architectural Historians Conference in Providence, RI, in April 2019.

SESAH Graduate Student Travel Grants, providing funding to deliver papers in Greenville, to three students: Edward Ke Sun, University of Florida; Stephanie Clough, Tulane University; and Ernesto Bilbao, University of Texas-Austin.

SESAH Emerging Professional Travel Grant to Casey Lee of the Tennessee State Historic Preservation Office, who delivered her paper in Greenville.

The Publications Award for essay was a tie that went to Kathryn O'Rourke of Trinity College for her introduction to *O'Neil Ford on Architecture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2019) and to George Dodds of the University of Tennessee, for "Brick Country House: Mies van der Rohe," in volume 4 of *Companions to the History of Architecture* (John Wiley & Sons, 2017).

The award for article went to Louis P. Nelson of the University of Virginia, for "Object Lesson: Memory and Monument in Charlottesville," *Buildings and Landscapes* 25 (Fall 2018).

The award for guidebook went to Karen Kingsley, Tulane University, and Lake Douglas, Louisiana State University, for *Buildings of New Orleans* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2018).

The book award was a tie that went to Monica Penick, University of Texas, for *Tastemaker: Elizabeth Gordon, House Beautiful, and the Postwar American Home* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2017) and to Avigail Sachs, University of Tennessee, for *Environmental Design: Architecture, Politics, and Science in Postwar America* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2018).

The Best of the South: Preserving Southern Architecture Award (BOTS) was given to Crosstown Concourse in Memphis, Tennessee, rehabilitated by the firm LRK of Memphis.

The business meeting ended with great anticipation: the announcement of next year's SESAHA conference. It will be held in Natchez, Mississippi, on October 1-3, 2020 at the Natchez Grand Hotel and the Natchez Convention Center. Carter Burns of the Historic Natchez Foundation gave a visual presentation of the city and its history, as well as conference venues and tours. SESAHA 2020 in Natchez promises to be another intellectually stimulating meeting in a beautiful historic setting.

Friday ended with the opportunity to witness what thoughtful urban design can do to inject life into a historic city: the "Fall for Greenville" street festival went into full swing Friday evening and continued through Saturday. Main Street was closed off to allow pedestrians to enjoy music, food, and drink, and many SESAHAers joined the crowd. But one more SESAHA event also took place on Saturday: the bus tour of architecture. Newly elected Vice President Lydia Brandt, of the University of South Carolina and resident of Greenville, offered a morning tour of North Greenville County, which included the colonial revival campus of Furman University and the end point of the Swamp Rabbit Trail at Travelers Rest, once a sleepy town, now growing due to the influx of hikers and bikers. It also included several nineteenth-century homesites in the countryside, some lovingly preserved and restored by descendants of early owners. Lydia also led an afternoon tour of sites in Greenville, including a 1920s synagogue retrofitted into an elegant and hip private residence as well as two African-American Baptist churches, one Italianate and the other modern, that continue to serve their communities. The tour ended at Greenville's last operating textile mill, Judson Mills, now empty. Its vast structure, built in phases from the beginning to the end of the 1900s, in the coming years will be turned into a multi-million dollar mix-used project. Perhaps one day SESAHA can return to Greenville to see how it continues to face the challenges of preserving its historic past and fostering economic growth.