A Secret History of Learned Societies

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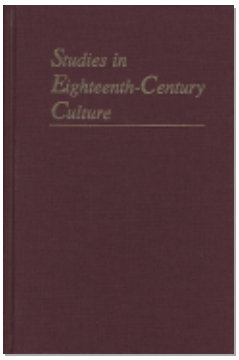

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A Secret History of Learned Societies

DENA GOODMAN

On 14 November 1979, Ron Rosbottom, Executive Secretary of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, wrote a long letter to the ASECS Steering Committee. "The Society is at a transitional point in its history," he wrote. "Despite Don Greene's repeated reminders that he handled everything with a few boxes of files and a mimeograph machine, ASECS has grown considerably in the past few years. . . . We cannot continue to fly by the seat of our pants." Ten years after a constitution was drafted, the first officers were elected, and the first annual meeting was held, ASECS required more administration than a single secretary could handle. "We are no longer a small group of devotees to the eighteenth century," Rosbottom continued, "but a major learned Society with all the complexity and diversity of responsibilities that implies." Correspondence alone took up much of his time. "We receive around 150 pieces of mail per week," he reported, and until he purchased a cassette recorder, he was typing "about 40 drafts of letters per week."[1]

Rosbottom proposed that a second person be brought in to assist him, "not simply another clerk," he explained, "but someone with major responsibilities." In fact, he had already recruited one of his colleagues, John Sena, to act as Associate Executive Secretary and proposed that the Society both confirm Sena's appointment and make the position official. Rosbottom stressed that in addition to helping with the newsletter and the program for the annual meeting, Sena acted "as a companion and colleague to whom I can turn for immediate responses and reactions about numerous matters."

The beleaguered secretary noted that with Sena's help his phone calls to members of the Board had decreased significantly.

In December, the Board approved Sena's appointment as Associate Executive Secretary, but the constitution was never amended to make this ad hoc solution permanent; he was the first and last person to hold this position. When the Society sought someone to succeed Rosbottom as secretary in 1981, Sena was the obvious candidate.[2] But, Sena withdrew his name from consideration. "The responsibilities of the Executive Secretary are awesome," he explained. "To assume them would be to terminate virtually all other areas of academic life."[3] Fortunately, others stepped forward, and R. G. Peterson was selected to succeed Rosbottom as executive secretary.

The work, of course, only increased as ASECS and its operations continued to grow. By 1991, the Board was seriously considering the idea of a "paid, full-time, 'permanent' Executive Secretary," in light of what President Jane Perry-Camp called "the enormous burden of the Executive Secretaryship in directing ASECS's complex, varied, and ever-increasing activities."[4] The Modern Languages Association and the American Historical Association were now run by paid professional staffs in New York and Washington, but ASECS did not have the resources to take this step. Its administration remained in the hands of a dedicated member rather than a paid professional. Peterson was succeeded by Ed Harris, Harris by Jeffrey Smitten, and Smitten by Byron Wells—all members of the Society who served part-time while continuing to hold academic positions.

And so, as we thank Byron for an extraordinary twenty years of voluntary service to the Society and thank Lisa Berglund for her willingness to pick up where Byron leaves off, I thought we might honor them by reflecting on the contribution of secretaries of learned societies to the intellectual life of the long eighteenth century, to which we, as a society, remain devoted.

Secretaries and Learned Societies: Long-Eighteenth-Century Origins

Let me begin with the word s*ecretary*. It comes from the word "secret" and referred originally to a subordinate entrusted with his master's secrets. Secrets eventually came to be associated with letters: the materialization of the master's thoughts in writing. The secretary was the person to whom the master entrusted those thoughts in order to be able to transmit them to a distant other and to produce a record of that communication. If a secretary at one end of a correspondence created the letter, a secretary at the other end filed, archived, and penned the response to it. The *Oxford English Dictionary* thus gives as a second definition, "One whose office it is to write for another; *spec.* one who is employed to conduct or assist with correspondence, to keep

records, and (usually) to transact various other business, for another person or for a society, corporation, or public body."[5]

Because correspondence was essential to the Republic of Letters from which academies emerged in the seventeenth century, secretaries became their key administrative officers. That is, as institutions of the Republic of Letters, academies became nodes in the correspondence networks by means of which knowledge and information were transmitted and exchanged, intellectual debates were powered, and the citizens of the Republic of Letters were bound to one another.[6] The secretary's role was to maintain the lines of communication between the academy and its distant members as well as between the academy and the world. Because he maintained the correspondence files, the secretary was thus often the academy's archivist as well.

When Henry Oldenburg was elected to what would become the Royal Society in December 1660, less than two months after it was founded, the practice of rotating the presidency every month was already established. The president's role was simply to preside at the weekly meetings. The decision had also already been made to hire two servants – one to assist with experiments and the other an "amanuensis to assist the Register," who kept the minutes.[7] When the society became incorporated by royal charter in 1662, the terms of officers—president, treasurer, and two secretaries—were set at one year. The secretaries, who took over from the register, were particularly important, because on behalf of the Royal Society they now exercised one of its most important privileges: to engage in correspondence, including with foreigners, "without any molestation, interruption, or disturbance whatsoever . . . in matters philosophical, mathematical, or mechanical." Oldenburg was one of the two secretaries elected in 1662; he was re-elected to that position for the next fifteen years and handled most of the duties. As his biographer notes, he achieved fame through this position, but not fortune. Like the other officers, but unlike the amanuensis or clerk, the secretary was unpaid. It was years before Oldenburg managed even to have the postage paid on all the mail he received on behalf of the Society.[8]

As secretary of the Royal Society, Oldenburg was responsible for taking and reading the minutes at the weekly meetings. At the meetings he also read aloud letters and papers sent to him by provincial fellows and (increasingly) foreign colleagues and correspondents. He was the recipient of those letters and papers because his major responsibility was to "draw up all letters to be written to any persons in the name of the Society." And although the paid amanuensis was responsible for the clerical work of copying and filing minutes, letters, and papers, the secretary had to supervise him and fill in for him when necessary.[9]

Five years into the job, Oldenburg was feeling the strain, especially since, despite being a gentleman, he also needed to make his living. On 27 April 1668, he presented to the Council of the Royal Society a lengthy description of his duties that ended with the question: "Whether such a person ought to be left unassisted?"[10] What he meant was not, however, that an assistant secretary should be appointed, but that he should be paid for the work he did. Apparently the Council did not agree. It has been suggested that they thought he was already making enough money off the *Philosophical Transactions*, which he edited for the Society. In any case they asserted as principle that the Royal Society's secretaries should collect no salaries—and then agreed to a one-time payment to Oldenburg of fifty pounds. The following year they relented further, granting Oldenburg a salary of forty pounds a year—about what he was making from the *Transactions*.[11]

The salary he began to receive in 1669 no doubt helped ease Oldenburg's concerns about putting food on the table, but his workload did not diminish. Indeed, the success of the Royal Society and his own increasing importance through his role in it meant the growth of his correspondence. In 1676 he was forced to apologize to one correspondent: "The multiplicity of letters, I am obliged to write making me sometimes forget, whether I have written such and such letters or not."[12]

In his 1667 *History of the Royal Society*, Thomas Sprat made clear that his intention was not to "usurp" the role of the secretary, upon whose minutes his account was based. The first official historian of the Royal Society distinguished his role from that of the secretary by writing always about the association, rather than for it, even though, like Oldenburg, he was a member of the Society. As J. Ereck Jarvis has noted, from Sprat's authorial perspective, the Society was always "they" and never "we."[13] This shift in perspective could be effected over time: upon his retirement as ASECS's first secretary, Donald Greene was named its historian.[14] No longer holding the responsibility of representing the Society, he could now write about it.

In France, as the relationship between the Republic of Letters and the public changed in the eighteenth century, so too did the role of the secretary of a learned society.[15] As men of letters and savants began to justify their work in terms of public utility and to orient themselves toward a reading public, the secretary took on the responsibility of representing them and their work to the public. Thanks to Bernard Le Bovier de Fontenelle, who became permanent secretary of the French Academy of Sciences in 1697, in the eighteenth century, writing eulogies of colleagues upon their death became the most notable public responsibility of secretaries of French learned societies. In the *Encyclopédie*, Jean le Rond d'Alembert, who served as permanent secretary of the Académie Française in the 1770s, argued that the

main purpose of academic eulogies was to produce an *histoire des lettres*, or intellectual history.[16] For d'Alembert, the value of eulogies lay in the collective impact of the history traced through them rather than in the moral example of each one individually. His protégé, Marie Jean Antoine Nicolas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet, gave the academic eulogy a political purpose when he became permanent secretary of the Academy of Sciences by calling particular attention to the ways in which his colleagues applied their scientific expertise to industry, agriculture, and economic policy. In so doing, as Tim Reeve has argued, he merged d'Alembert's history of scientific progress with a modernizing history of France whose aim was to support and encourage the mobilization of science in the service of the state.[17]

As Friedrich-Melchior Grimm wrote in a critical review of Condorcet's first efforts as a eulogist, "The job of a secretary of the Academy of Sciences is to make accessible to everyone the most complicated systems, the most profound ideas, the most abstract matters."[18] To this end, the secretary also wrote and delivered a report on the activities of the Academy at its annual public meeting, which was attended by the elite public, including fashionable women and dignitaries from the highest levels of the court. The secretary was now the academy's public face; his job was as much to communicate to the public as to facilitate communication within his society and between it and other individuals and institutions within the Republic of Letters. For Condorcet, this meant that as secretary of the Academy of Sciences, his role was to coordinate all scientific activity and publication in France.[19]

I have been thinking (and learning) about the work of a secretary of a learned society recently not only in my capacity as a member of the ASECS Board, but also through my research on Augustin-François Silvestre, whose major contributions to the history of science took the form of secretarial work. From 1791 to 1803, Silvestre was secretary of the Société philomatique, and, from 1799 to 1841, he was permanent secretary of the French Society of Agriculture. Here I would like to bring his experience into the history that begins with Henry Oldenburg and lives on today in learned societies such as ASECS.

François Silvestre and the Société Philomatique

In December 1788, six young men, including twenty-six year old François Silvestre, librarian of the king's brother, formed a club whose modest purpose was to keep themselves up to date on the latest scientific research. They met weekly until the spring of 1789, around the time the Estates General opened in Versailles. They reconvened in the fall, after the National Assembly was formed, the Bastille had fallen, the Great Fear had subsided in the

countryside, the privileges of the Old Regime had been abolished, and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen had been adopted.[20]

As the deputies in Versailles got to work on a constitution, the six young scientists who gathered in Silvestre's apartment in the Louvre dubbed themselves the Société philomatique and took as their motto "Etude et Amitié," Study and Friendship.[21] They then elected officers and three new members. Silvestre was elected both president and treasurer, the naturalist Gaspard Riche was elected secretary, and Alexandre Brongniart, a recent graduate of the Ecole des Mines, was elected vice-secretary. Silvestre and Riche were both 27 years old, Brongniart was 19. Eighteen months later, when Riche joined the Entrecastaux Expedition to the South Seas, Silvestre replaced him as secretary. As presidents came and went, each serving a three-month term, Silvestre and Brongniart steered the Society through the Revolution. Silvestre served as secretary until 1803, and Brongniart, who had been elected treasurer in April 1791, continued to be re-elected to that office for the next forty years.

Over the course of the twelve years that Silvestre served as secretary of the Société philomatique, not only did the French Revolution take its course but the Society grew to fifty resident members, sixty-five correspondents, and two emeritus members. By the turn of the century, the Société philomatique was widely recognized as second in importance in the French Republic of Science only to the Institut de France, which had been established to replace the old royal academies in 1795.

Like Oldenburg before him, Silvestre saw his correspondence increase as the Society grew. Correspondence was particularly important for connecting the corresponding members to the Society. The first four corresponding members were elected in 1789, two days after the founders elected the first three new resident members.[22] Friendship bound them to the society, but their distance from Paris meant that letters were their only means of expressing and renewing those ties. Silvestre's exchanges with the corresponding members show that he saw his role as more than simply administrative; he was also responsible for renewing the intellectual and affective ties of "study and friendship" that made a Philomath a Philomath.

On 31 May 1791, the minutes record that the decision was made to establish "une correspondance suivie et sans interruption avec ses correspondants." To formalize this correspondence, the secretary was charged to send out a newsletter to which the corresponding members were subscribed.[23] The next day Silvestre wrote to the foreign minister to ask that he support the Society and its work on behalf of the sciences by allowing his secretarial correspondence with foreign members to be sent under diplomatic cover. The minister granted the Society this valuable privilege which was renewed by his successors.[24]

One of the first corresponding members was Charles-Louis Dumas, a young physician who had come to Paris in 1787 to continue his medical studies but had returned to Montpellier the following year to take up a chair at the medical school.[25] In 1790, he dedicated his doctoral thesis to the Société philomatique; seven years later he sought the Society's approval for a plan he had devised for improving medical education.[26] Silvestre responded with a long letter. He spoke first for the Society, which had recognized the utility of Dumas's plan. He then noted that the Society's newsletter, to which the corresponding members were expected to contribute, was particularly weak on medical topics. He urged Dumas to send in any news items that might be appropriate, reminding him that these should be based on "des observations bien constatées" of rare phenomena that led to "des résultats vraiment utiles." The Society would be particularly interested in receiving extracts of papers delivered at Montpellier's Société des sciences, of which Dumas was a member. "Nous ne recevons que pour donner comme vous savez," Silvestre continued, "et ce centre d'instruction que nous voulons toujours perfectionner acquerrait un grand signe d'intérêt si toutes les sociétés savantes de la république l'enrichissaient du résultat de leurs travaux."[27]

After sharing with Dumas the sad news that their friend and colleague, Gaspard Riche, had died, Silvestre wrote in closing as a friend to a friend whom he had not seen in many years:

> J'ai quelquefois mon cher ami l'occasion de rencontrer votre aimable frère et je lui me rappelle toujours avec grand plaisir notre ancienne liaison. Je ne désespère pas de nous voir unis quelque jour au moins momentanément. Il faut croire que vous voudriez revoir Paris et que vos anciens amis pourront entrer pour quelque chose dans vos projets. Adieu, mon cher Dumas. Quel que soit l'incertitude de mon sort je ne puis pas désespérer pas de voir encore quelques instants de bonheur et je devrai toujours les plus chers à l'amitié. Ecrivez moi, et donnez-moi des détails sur tout ce qui vous touche et qui par cours y viens de m'intéresser si vivement.[28]

In this letter to a corresponding member, friendship weighed more heavily than study, but the balance often fell the other way. One particularly rich exchange began in1796.[29] That March, corresponding member Justin Girod-Chantrans sent in the latest in a series of papers based on research he had been conducting for several years on a type of algae called *conferva*.[30] A self-taught naturalist who had retired to Besançon after a career in the army, Girod-Chantrans was pursuing a line of research on polyps that went back to the mid-eighteenth century.[31] In June, Silvestre read to the Society the first part of Girod-Chantrans's paper, in which he made the bold argument that, like

coral, conferva were not plants but animals. A committee was then appointed to repeat his experiments and validate his controversial conclusions. The importance the Society attached to this research is evidenced by the further decision to have one of the members present Girod-Chantrans's work to the newly-formed Institut de France, should the results be validated.[32] Girod-Chantrans responded with more papers on the same subject enclosed in a letter to Silvestre expressing his gratitude for the support of the Society and especially its secretary. "Personne n'est plus sensible que moi au pouvoir de l'amitié," he wrote, "elle est la bonne comme le tourment de ma vie et l'union donc vous me faites le tableau, jointe à l'estime réciproque qui règne parmi les membres de votre société."[33]

Fifteen months later, in October 1797, Silvestre wrote again to Girod-Chantrans to thank him for two more papers he had sent in. They too would be sent to the Institut where, Silvestre wrote encouragingly, the earlier ones had received a warm reception. However, in order to repeat his new experiments and thus validate the results, the Society needed samples of the specimens that Girod-Chantrans had examined under the microscope. Silvestre also asked Girod-Chantrans to clarify the terminology that he had used in one of the experiments. Admitting that the existing literature was unclear on the subject, several members of the Society who had done relevant research believed nevertheless that more precision was possible. Mentoring his colleague, Silvestre explained the importance of including a good description of the phenomenon under discussion so that readers would be able to recognize it, even if their opinions about it differed. He closed the letter with an expression of friendship for a member whom he had never met: "Je vous renouvelle l'expression du désir que nous avons de vous voir au milieu de nous à Paris, vous trouverez dans les membres de la société autant d'amis qui se feront un plaisir de vous voir, et de vous communiquer les travaux dont ils sont occupés."[34]

As secretary of the Société philomatique, Silvestre not only actively encouraged correspondents like Dumas and Girod-Chantrans to send in their papers and reports, he also mediated intellectual exchange between them and their colleagues in Paris, softening the criticism and helping them to respond to it. In addition, he facilitated the circulation of their findings beyond Paris through the reports he delivered at the Society's annual public meeting and then published.[35] In 1798, he closed the botany section of his first *Rapport général des travaux de la Société Philomatique de Paris* with a long discussion of Girod-Chantrans's research, pointing out both the originality of his conclusions and the extent of his microscopic observations. After describing these observations and findings in detail, Silvestre addressed his colleagues directly, reminding them of the special actions they had taken

to make this important research known. "Sur le rapport des commissaires que vous aviez chargés d'examiner cet immense travail," he wrote, "vous avez cru devoir le communiquer à l'institut national; tant pour donner la publicité néessaire à ces observations curieuses, que pour faire jouir le citoyen Chantrans de la portion de gloire qu'il lui a méritée, en le soumettant à l'appréciation de juges aussi éclairés."[36] When Girod-Chantrans published his *Recherches chimiques et microscopiques sur les conferves, bisses, tremelles, etc.* in 1802, he acknowledged the support and encouragement of his colleagues in the Société philomatique, citing Silvestre's report in a footnote.[37]

Girod-Chantrans represented what Silvestre thought the Société philomatique was all about: original research carried out meticulously through observation and experiment by a novice with the encouragement and support of the Society. The critical back and forth between members, both in the discussions that took place at the weekly meetings and through the correspondence that he facilitated as secretary, was an essential part of the process of scientific research as he and the Philomaths conceived it. Through Silvestre's efforts as secretary, the results of the labors of an obscure retired military officer became part of the collective and growing body of scientific knowledge.

Silvestre's correspondence on behalf of the Société philomatique extended beyond individual members to the learned societies that were springing up across France in the late 1790s. In November 1797, he wrote to the Société d'agriculture et arts of Boulogne-sur-Mer that the Société philomatique "a accepté avec joie la correspondance que vous lui proposez." In exchange for copies of the Société philomatique's newsletter, Silvestre requested materials to contribute to it in the future and suggested that his counterpart send accounts of the work presented at their meetings. Such an exchange would contribute to the Society's larger goals, as Silvestre explained, using the same language that he had used a month earlier when he asked Dumas, the Society's correspondent in Montpellier, for material for the newsletter: "Nous pensons que le centre d'instruction que nous voulons toujours perfectionner acquerrait un grand degré d'intérêt si toutes les sociétés savantes de la République l'enrichissaient du résultat de leurs travaux."[38]

At the meeting of 23 germinal year 6 [12 April 1798], Silvestre read aloud a letter from the secretary of the Société d'émulation of Abbeville. He had included a report on his society's activities since its inception three months earlier, and the Société philomatique charged its secretary to request copies of several papers discussed in it.[39] In August, the secretary of Bordeaux's Société des sciences, belles-lettres et arts thanked Silvestre for the copy he had just received of the *Rapport general* published that year and expressed

his colleagues' desire "d'augmenter de plus en plus ses rapports avec une société aussi distinguée qu'est la société philomatique de Paris."[40]

The Société philomatique's network of institutional correspondence often built on the individual relationships established with its correspondents. In November 1796, the secretary of the Société d'émulation of Rouen wrote fraternally that as one of their mutual colleagues had shared with them the report on the Paris society's work, the Rouen society was returning the favor with a report on their activities. In doing so, Secretary Auber made sure to acknowledge the nature of the relationship between the two societies: "Si Paris est le centre principal des lumières, les grandes communes des Départements doivent les répandre les propager & même les seconder."[41] Seven months later, Silvestre acknowledged receipt of reports that Auber had sent of the subsequent work of the Rouen society, along with its by-laws and a list of its members. In return, the Rouen society would receive several back issues of the newsletter and be subscribed to it for the future.[42]

The following year, it was Auber's turn to thank Silvestre for the report he had sent of the Société philomatique's work. "La Société en lisant votre éloquente introduction a partagé votre tristesse et vos regrets lorsque vous avez rappelé à son souvenir les Pelletier, les Vicq d'Azyr et les Lavoisier," Auber wrote to his counterpart. "L'Éloge du Citoyen Riche n'a la pas moins émue. Il lui a fait aussi verser des larmes avec le Citoyen Cuvier son panégyriste." Auber then reflected optimistically on the larger picture that Silvestre had painted in his report. "En voyant ces grandes pertes faites par votre Société et par la République des Lettres," he wrote, "on tremblerait pour le sort des Sciences et des Arts, si le sang des généreux martyrs de la Philosophie n'était pas une semonce féconde de Philosophes et de Savants, si la liste de vos membres et de vos correspondants, ne nous offrait pas un grand nombre d'hommes de génie et de défenseurs courageux de la vérité bien propre à affermir son empire et à relever nos espérances."[43]

Letters such as this one were the reward Silvestre reaped for the many hours he spent on the Society's affairs. Like Oldenburg, however, Silvestre also had to earn a living. In January 1795, he was hired to run the educational programs at the state Mining Agency, including its engineering school, the Ecole des Mines. He also served as secretary of the Conférence des Mines, the weekly meeting of the Agency's savants, engineers, and professors.[44] By 1801, Silvestre's responsibilities for the Société philomatique had become so time-consuming and the Society's correspondence so substantial that a proposal was put forward to establish a new position of corresponding secretary to ease the burden on the secretary.[45] It is unclear if Silvestre put forward the proposal himself, or if his friends did so in order to keep him from resigning his office. In any event, in early June, a committee composed

of Silvestre, Brongniart, and Georges Cuvier was charged with evaluating the proposal and creating a job description.

In their report the committee pointed to an increased volume of correspondence, both with corresponding members and with other learned societies, due to the visibility the Society had achieved through its publications. In order for the Society and its members to benefit from its success, someone had to maintain this correspondence, and the current secretary was simply too busy to do so. The committee also noted the importance of including in the Society's newsletter reports and results of research being conducted beyond Paris and the laxity of the corresponding members in providing it. They needed to be reminded that in exchange for receiving the newsletter they were expected to send in news for it. This could only be done by means of personal correspondence, not form letters. Finally, the committee also noted the necessity of conveying to the correspondents the substance of the discussion of the papers they submitted for review by their Parisian colleagues. In short, correspondence on a vast scale was crucial for the exchange and dissemination of scientific information and ideas that were central to the Society's purpose and vision.[46]

The committee thus proposed that the Society's constitution (*règlements*) be amended to include among the officers a corresponding secretary whose duties would be as follows: to maintain a regular correspondence with savants and learned societies; to respond in the name of the Society to all letters addressed to it that deal with the sciences; to remind the corresponding members of the Society as often as possible of the commitment they have made to it; to communicate to those who sent papers to the Society the discussions that these papers raised.

The corresponding secretary would also serve on the editorial board of the newsletter. In other words, the corresponding secretary would take over all the secretary's duties except taking minutes and handling routine administrative correspondence. The committee had effectively described the job of the secretary himself.[47]

The committee presented its report on 2 July 1801, just two days after Silvestre had accepted a new position as head of the Bureau of Agriculture in the Interior Ministry. In fact, the idea of creating a corresponding secretary had been raised just around the time that Silvestre's nomination for this post had been put forward.[48] It was thus no doubt in anticipation of this hoped-for result that Silvestre and his friends sought to scale down his responsibilities as secretary of the Société philomatique without, however, losing him entirely. His experience and the continuity he provided were just too valuable. Happily, the committee's recommendation was accepted by the membership, since Silvestre had anticipated correctly the demands of

his new job. In August, he wrote to his nephew: "Ne sois ni inquiet ni fâché mon cher ami, si depuis quelque temps tu reçois moins fréquemment des lettres de moi, mais j'emploie tant de temps à écrire pour les autres qu'il ne me reste pas souvent le courage de prendre la plume pour moi."[49]

The astronomer Jean-Baptiste Biot was elected corresponding secretary, but, less than two years later, Silvestre stepped down as secretary anyway. Biot was elected to replace him, and the position of corresponding secretary was never filled or brought up again. But the archives suggest that no subsequent secretary threw himself into the role as Silvestre had. Their letters tend to be businesslike, whereas his reflect a belief in the importance of correspondence to forging and maintaining the bonds of friendship through which individual study entered into the dynamic of active collaboration and science progressed.

Conclusion

Secretaries of learned societies are much rarer today than they were when ASECS was founded in the 1960s. ASECS, in fact, no longer has an executive secretary but an executive director. This makes me sad because the title reminds us of the roots of societies such as ours in the long eighteenth century and its tradition of gentlemanly voluntarism. Following Steven Shapin's lead, historians of science have shed welcome light on the invisible labor of the laboratory, especially that of family members subsumed under patriarchal authority; they have also begun to look at invisible labor in the field: those who wielded picks and hunted specimens for others to collect, dissect, and classify.[50] The invisible labor of the secretary, however, has by and large escaped serious attention precisely because secretaries of this sort were not clerical workers but gentlemen members of the societies to which they belonged: their labor was not labor. When secretaries of learned societies are studied, it is generally from the other side of the power dynamic, as power brokers and wielders of power who achieved high status and honor through holding this position.[51]

Why then abandon such an honorable title? The answer lies, I think, in the gendered connotations that came to adhere to the word secretary in the late twentieth century.[52] By 1988, the Conference of Secretaries of the American Council of Learned Societies raised the question: "Who are we, anyway? Or at least, what do we call ourselves?" While acknowledging that learned societies had always been run by secretaries, Dorothy Atkinson from the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies noted that no one seemed to know "what the *secretary* of a learned society does. Rather than performing purely secretarial functions," she complained, "we are the

people who make the organization work. Newspaper advertisements for *secretaries* identify a different occupation." Margaret King of the Renaissance Society of America echoed Atkinson's frustration. Her own society was "so confused by the title *secretary*," she recounted, "that they one time sent the office secretary to the Conference of Secretaries." Joe Hickerson from the Society of Ethnomusicology had already complained to his colleagues that his title was "archaic;" in his opinion, the ethnomusicologists should have a "business office with an *executive director*." Irene Tichenor of the Bibliographical Society of America agreed: "I think *secretary* is a loaded and confusing word," she declared.[53]

Secretary had become a dirty word. I find it significant that most of the secretaries who raised the issue and were most adamant about it were female. As such, they were more likely to be confused with clerical workers than their male colleagues were, and less likely to have the honor of holding their important offices in the Republic of Letters recognized by their chairs and deans in Academia. The hours of work they put in were seen as merely clerical. For men like Joe Hickerson, of course, masculinity itself might have been at stake.

In any case, a motion was introduced to change the name to "Conference of *Executive Officers*," but when various members objected that they were not CEOs of their organizations, the motion was amended to "Conference of *Administrative Officers*." When the further objection was raised that no one actually had that title, R. G. Peterson of ASECS informed his colleagues that in fact he did. When the motion was put to a vote, it carried overwhelmingly. "The name change will take effect at the April meeting," wrote Nina Kressner Cobb of the ACLS. "I dare say it will take some getting used to."[54]

Peterson was only half right when he said that he was ASECS's administrative officer. He, was in fact, its executive secretary. However, the ASECS constitution defined the secretary as "the chief administrative officer of the Society."[55] Sometime between 1992 and 2011, when the constitution was last revised, the title was finally changed to "Executive Director."[56] Byron Wells is the first person officially to hold that title. But I hope that he and Lisa Berglund and their successors will be proud to see themselves as following in the honorable eighteenth-century tradition of the secretary of the learned society—and especially of Henry Oldenburg and François Silvestre—who dedicated themselves selflessly to the societies they served and the larger goals of the Republic of Letters advanced through them.

NOTES

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1. Ron Rosbottom to Members of the Steering Committee and Philip Harth, 14 November 1979. ASECS archives, William Andrews Clark Library, UCLA, Box 2, folder 19. On the founding of ASECS, see "Report of the Provisional Executive Board, 1969–1970," ASECS archives, Box 7, folder 4; and Donald Greene, "The ASECS's Early Years: A Personal Memoir," in Carla H. Hay and Syndy M. Conger, eds., *The Past as Prologue: Essays to Celebrate the Twenty-fifth Anniversary of ASECS* (New York: AMS Press, 1995), 3–17.

2. Madeleine B. Therrien, President, ASECS, to [members of the ASECS Board], 6 December 1979, ASECS archives, Box 2, folder 19. Shirley Bill, chair of the Society's Constitution Committee, had offered her opinion that such an appointment would be possible without amending the Constitution, especially if the title were Editor of the News Circular and Associate Executive Secretary, since the Constitution allowed for the appointment of unspecified editors of the Society's publications. Shirley [Bill] to Ron [Rosbottom], 12 September 1979, ASECS archives, Box 2, folder 19.

3. John F. Sena to Jean Perkins, 1 May 1981. ASECS archives, Box 35, folder 3.

4. Jane [Perry-Camp] to Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, 1 September 1991, ASECS archives, Box 34, folder 3; [Perry-Camp] to E. P. Harris, ASECS Executive Secretary, 11 August 1991. In her letter to Harris, Perry-Camp laid out a four-year plan, from appointing a committee to do a feasibility study to searching for and hiring a permanent secretary.

5. "One who is entrusted with private or secret matters; a confidant; one privy *to* a secret." Secretary, n.1 and adj." *OED Online*, accessed 25 May 2016, March 2016. Oxford Univ. Press. *http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/174549?rskey=WfTHKP&result=1&isAdvanced=false*. Having a secretary was a form of power and a privilege primarily of princes. The *OED* notes that the history of the usage of the term shows that for a long time *secretary* referred quite narrowly to "the officer who conducted the correspondence of a king.". Here is the first definition in

the *Dictionnaire* of the Académie Française in 1694: "Celui dont l'emploi est d'écrire pour son maître, de faire des lettres, des dépêches pour son maître, pour celui dont il dépend." ["Someone whose job is making and writing letters, dispatches for his master, for the person on whom he is dependent."] (I have modernized French spelling here and in subsequent quotations; all translations are my own.) Virtually the same wording is found in other French dictionaries throughout the eighteenth century. See *Dictionnaires d'autrefois,* accessed 7 April 2016, *http://artflsrv02.uchicago.edu/philologic4/publicdicos/query?report=bibliography&head=secretaire*. Examples show that secretaries could range from ordinary clerks to the venal officeholders known as *secrétaires du roi*.

6. See, e.g., Hans Bots and Françoise Waquet, eds., *Commercium Litterarium, 1600–1750: La Communication dans la République des Lettres/Forms of Communication in the Republic of Letters* (Amsterdam: APA-Holland Univ. Press, 1994); Ann Goldgar, *Impolite Learning: Conduct and Community in the Republic of Letters, 1680–1750* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1995).

7. Marie Boas Hall, *Henry Oldenburg: Shaping the Royal Society* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002), 57–58.

8. Hall, *Henry Oldenburg*, 70, 74.

9. Hall, 71, 74, 78–79.

10. Hall, 276.

11. Hall, 276–77.

12. *Correspondence*, 12: 364, 6 July 1676; quoted in Hall, 293.

13. J. Ereck Jarvis, "Thomas Sprat's 'Mixt Assembly:' Association and Authority in the History of the Royal Society," *Restoration* 37 (Fall 2013): 63–64.

14. Greene, "ASECS's Early Years," 3.

15. On the eighteenth-century Republic of Letters, see Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994).

16. Jean le Rond d'Alembert, "Academic Eulogies," trans. Dena Goodman, in *The Encyclopedia of Diderot & d'Alembert Collaborative Translation Project* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Publishing, Univ. of Michigan Library, 2013), accessed 12 October 2013, *http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.did2222.0002.991*. Originally published as «Eloges academiques,» *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Paris, 1755), 5: 527–28. Similarly, the anatomist Félix Vicq d'Azyr, who delivered more than fifty eulogies as secretary of the Academy of Medicine in the 1770s and 1780s, called the eulogies of scientists "des matériaux pour l'histoire de l'esprit humain" [materials for the history of the human spirit]. He also noted that whereas Fontenelle had to be concerned about boring his listeners and readers with too much scientific detail, in his own day, "les circonstances sont changées: le goût des sciences est universellement répandu, et les lecteurs demandent une histoire de leurs progrès" [circumstances have changed: the taste for the sciences is universal, and readers demand a history of their progress]. Vicq-d'Azyr, "Eloges historiques: considérations générales," in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Jacques Louis Moreau (de la Sarthe) (Paris: Duprat-Duverger, 1805), 1: 1–6. On Vicq-d'Azyr's eulogies, see Daniel Roche, "Médecins et Lumières au XVIIIe siècle : talents, raison et sacrifice,"

in *Les républicains des lettres: Gens de culture et Lumières au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 309–14.

17. Tim Reeve, "Science in the Service of the State: Condorcet's *Eloges des académiciens de l'Académie royale des sciences*," *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28 (2005): 229–38; see also Charles Paul, *Science and Immortality: The "Eloges" of the Paris Academy of Sciences (1699–1791)* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1980), 62.

18. *Correspondance littéraire, philosophique et critique*, ed. Maurice Tourneux (Paris: Garnier frères, 1879), 10: 198 (February 1773).

19. Keith Michael Baker, "Les débuts de Condorcet au secrétariat de l'Académie royale des Sciences (1773–1776)," *Revue d'histoire des sciences et de leurs applications* 20 (July–September 1967): 256–58.

20. The definitive study of the Société philomatique is Jonathan Renato Mandelbaum, "La Société Philomathique de Paris de 1788 à 1835: essai d'histoire institutionnelle et de biographie collective d'une société savante parisienne," (Ph.D. dissertation, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1983). On Silvestre, see Dena Goodman and Emily Talbot, "Documenting Art, Writing Biography: Construction of the Silvestre Family History, 1660–1868," *Journal of Family History* 40 (July 2015): 277–304.

21. On the meanings and functions of friendship during this period, see Kenneth Loiselle, *Brotherly Love: Freemasonry and Male Friendship in Enlightenment France* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2014); and Sarah Horowitz, *Friendship and Politics in Post-Revolutionary France* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 2013).

22. Mandelbaum, "Société Philomathique de Paris," 462. The other three correspondents were a physician named Guichard (about whom nothing else is known); Antoine de Lasalle, a world traveler and self-made philosopher who became a disciple of Lazarro Spallanzani in Rome, invented the pantographe, came to Paris to study in 1780, published his first major work there in 1788: *La Balance naturelle, ou essai sur une loi universelle appliquée aux sciences, arts et métiers et aux moindres details de la vie commune*, and then retired to Semur in Burgundy; and, Friedrich-Ludwig Schurer, who received his medical degree in Strasbourg in 1789 and went on to become a professor of chemistry at the artillery school there. For biographical details on La Salle, see Ferdinand Hoefer, *Nouvelle biographie universelle* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1842–1877), 29: 730–31.

23. ". . . a regular uninterrupted correspondence with the corresponding members." Unsigned document in Brongniart's hand, extracted from minutes of 31 May 1791, Bibliothèque de la Sorbonne (hereafter BS), Box 129.

24. Silvestre to M. de Montmorin, ministre des affaires étrangers, 1 June 1791, BS Box 128; Silvestre to secrétaire du département des affaires étrangers sur la réponse de M. Dumouriez en date du 18 avril 1792, BS Box 128.

25. Prunelle, *Eloge funèbre de Charles-Louis Dumas, prononcé dans l'Assemblée publique de la Faculté de Montpellier, le 14 Décembre 1813* (Montpellier: Jean Martel aîné, 1814), 26–27.

26. Claude-Louis Dumas, *Q. F. F. F. F. Q. S. Quaestiones medicae duodecim* (Montpellier: Joseph-François Tournel, 1790) ; C. L. Dumas to Société philomatique, 14 fructidor an 5 (31 August 1797), BS Box 133.

27. "... the most well-documented observations possible and which lead to truly useful results;" "We only receive in order to give, as you know, and this center of education that we are always trying to improve would attract great interest if all the learned societies of the republic enriched it with the results of their labors." Draft of Silvestre to Dumas, 30 vendémiaire an 6 (21 October 1797), BS Box 128.

28. "I have sometimes had occasion to run into your nice brother and I am reminded always with great pleasure of our long relationship. I do not despair of seeing us together again one day, at least briefly. I have to believe that you would like to see Paris again and your old friends would enter into your plans. Goodbye my dear Dumas. Whatever the uncertainty of my future, I cannot despair of seeing again a few moments of happiness and I will always owe the dearest ones to friendship. Write to me, and share with me everything that touches you and which will, of course, interest me deeply." Draft of Silvestre to Dumas, 30 vendémiaire an 6 (21 October 1797), BS Box 128.

29. See Mandelbaum, "Société philomathique de Paris," 90–97, for a detailed discussion of this case.

30. Girod-Chantrans to Société Philomatique, 13 ventôse an 4 (3 March 1796), BS Box 133.

31. See Mary Terrall, *Catching Nature in the Act: Réamur and the Practice of Natural History in the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2014), 119–31; Marc J. Ratcliff, *The Quest for the Invisible: Microscopy in the Enlightenment* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), 103–23 and 237–39.

32. Minutes of meeting of 3 messidor [an 4] (21 June 1796), BS Box 123. Georges Cuvier, who was a member of both the Société philomatique and the Institut, was to present the work.

33. "No one is more sensitive than I to the power of friendship; it is both the good and the torment of my life, and you thus bring them together for me, joined to the mutual esteem that reigns among the members of your society." Girod-Chantrans to [Silvestre], 7 thermidor an 4 (25 July 1796), BS Box 133. Silvestre read these new papers to the assembled Philomaths at the next meeting. Minutes of meeting of 13 thermidor [an 4] (31 July 1796), based on multiple partial drafts in BS Box 123.

34. "Let me express once again our desire to see you among us in Paris. You will find in the members of the Society so many friends who would be pleased to see you, and to share with you the work that they are doing." Draft of Silvestre to Girod-Chantrans, 1 brumaire an 6 (22 October 1797), BS Box 128.

35. Although the bylaws of 1791 specified that a public meeting was to be held once a year on the anniversary of the founding of the Society, none was held for several years after the first one, in December 1791, when Riche was still secretary.

36. "Based on the report of the committee you had charged with examining this immense body of work you believed that it must be communicated to the Institut national, both to give the necessary publicity to these curious observations and so that citizen Chantrans could enjoy the portion of glory he had earned, by submitting it to

the appreciation of such enlightened judges." Augustin-François Silvestre, *Rapport général des travaux de la Société Philomatique* (1798), 99–102. Although public meetings and reports were supposed to be annual, this report covered the period from January 1792 through 23 frimaire an 6 (13 December 1797)—the date of the Society's first public meeting since Silvestre became secretary.

37. [Justin] Girod-Chantrans, *Recherches chimiques et microscropiques sur les conferves, bisses, tremelles, etc.* (Paris: Bernard, an 10 [1802]), vi.

38. ". . . accepted with joy the correspondence that you propose;" "We believe that the center of education that we are always trying to improve would attract great interest if all the learned societies of the Republic enriched it with the results of their labors." Copy of Silvestre to Société d'agriculture et arts de Boulogne sur Mer, 15 brumaire an 6 (5 November 1797), BS Box 128.

39. Minutes of meeting of 23 germinal [an 6] (12 April 1798), BS Box 123.

40. ". . . to strengthen more and more their connections with a society as distinguished as the Société philomatique of Paris." Leupold, Secretary of the first class of the Société des sciences, belles-lettres et arts of Bordeaux, 23 thermidor an 6 (10 August 1798), BS Box 133.

41. "If Paris is the main center of Enlightenment, the great communes of the Departments must spread, propagate, and indeed support it." Auber, Secretary of Société d'émulation of Rouen to Société philomatique, 28 brumaire an 5 (18 November 1796), BS Box 133.

42. Copy of Silvestre to Auber, Secretary of Société d'émulation of Rouen, 4 messidor an 5 (22 June 1797), BS Box 128.

43. "In reading your eloquent introduction, the Society shared your sadness and your regrets when you recalled to its memory Pelletier, Vicq d'Azyr, and Lavoisier. The eulogy of citizen Riche was no less moving. It caused tears to be shed with Citizen Cuvier, his panegyrist. In seeing these great losses suffered by your Society and by the Republic of Letters one would tremble for the fate of the Sciences and the Arts, if the blood of the generous martyrs of Philosophy had not been the fertile seed of Philosophes and Savants, if the list of your members and your correspondents did not offer us a great number of men of genius and brave defenders of the truth well suited to strengthen its empire and raise our hopes." Auber, Secretary of Société d'émulation of Rouen to Silvestre, Secretary General of the Société philomatique, 30 thermidor an 6 (17 August 1798), BS Box 133. The minutes record that Silvestre read this letter aloud at the meeting of 3 fructidor an 6 (20 August 1798), BS Box 123. At the same meeting he read a letter acknowledging receipt of the *Rapport general* from the Société des sciences, belles-lettres et arts (Bordeaux), as well as one from the secretary of a society in Boulogne-sur-Mer reporting on an unusual childbirth.

44. On the Agence des Mines, see Isabelle Laboulais, *La Maison des mines : la genèse révolutionnaire d'un corps d'ingénieurs civils (1794–1814)* (Rennes: Presses Univ. de Rennes, 2012). Silvestre's start date is unclear. In a document prepared in 1819, Silvestre dates his hire as 16 nivôse an 2 (5 January 1794), which is before the agency was established. Archives Nationales de France (hereafter AN) F/1Bi/279/3. Laboulais does not give a precise date, but says he started at the beginning of the

year 3, which would be October 1794. Laboulais, *Maison des mines*, 59, 99. I am suggesting that they got the dates mixed up— Silvestre got the year wrong, and Laboulais might have meant the beginning of 1795, not the year 3.

45. Report in Brongniart's hand, [13 messidor an 9 (2 July 1801)], BS Box 129, item no. 439. The initial proposal was recorded in the minutes of 23 prairial an 9 (12 June 1801), BS Box 123.

46. Report in Brongniart's hand, [13 messidor an 9 (2 July 1801)], BS Box 129.

47. ASECS executive secretary Paul Korshin proposed dividing up the administrative duties similarly when the decision was made in 1977 to hire a business manager. Paul Korshin to Phillip Harth, 28 February 1977. ASECS archives, Box 4, folder 25.

48. Silvestre to Augustin-Henry Bonnard, 12 prairial, an 9 (1 June 1801), 18 messidor an 9 (7 July 1801), AN 352 AP 43; Silvestre to Interior Minister Jean-Antoine Chaptal, 11 messidor an 9 (30 June 1801), AN F/10/1483.

49. "Don't be either worried or angry at me, my dear friend, if for a while you have been receiving letters from me less frequently, but I am spending so much time writing for other people that often I don't have enough courage left to take up the pen for myself." Silvestre to Bonnard, 20 thermidor an 9 (8 August 1801), AN 352 AP 43.

50. Steven Shapin, "The Invisible Technician," *American Scientist* 77 (November–December 1989): 554–63; a later version appears as chapter 9 of Shapin, *A Social History of Truth: Civility and Science in Seventeenth-Century England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1994).

For an overview of the scholarship on invisible labor in the household, see Alix Cooper, "Homes and Households," in *The Cambridge History of Science*, ed. Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston [Online]. The Cambridge History of Science (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2006). Available from Cambridge Histories Online *<http://dx.doi.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/10.1017/CHOL9780521572446>* [Accessed 07 April 2016], 224–38. Particular studies include Monika Mommertz, "The Invisible Economy of Science: A New Approach to the History of Gender and Astronomy at the Eighteenth-Century Berlin Academy of Sciences," trans. Julia Baker, in *Men, Women, and the Birthing of Modern Science*, ed. Judith Zinsser (DeKalb: Northern Illinois Univ. Press, 2005), 159–78; and, Terrall, *Catching Nature in the Act.* Lydia Barnett is currently embarked on a study of invisible labor in natural history fieldwork.

51. Keith Baker frames this episode in Condorcet's career in relation to the philosophes' struggle for control of the academies; with his appointment as secretary of the Academy of Sciences, he writes, "Condorcet was set on the road to power in the most powerful scientific body in Europe." Keith Michael Baker, *Condorcet: From Natural Philosophy to Social Mathematics* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), 40. Although she shows how hard Oldenberg worked as secretary of the Royal Society, Hall emphasizes that his election gave him "a post of responsibility and a distinguished position in the world of learning both at home . . . and abroad." Hall, 52.

52. I examine this issue from another perspective in "The Secretaire and the Integration of the Eighteenth-Century Self," in Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg, eds., *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: What Furniture Can Tell Us about the European and American Past* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 183–203.

53. Minutes of 11–13 November 1988 meeting, Conference of [heretofore] Secretaries, American Council of Learned Societies. ASECS archives, Box 18, folder 23.

54. Nina Kressner Cobb, Executive Associate, ACLS, to ACLS Conference of Administrative Officers, 14 March 1989. ASECS archives, Box 18, folder 23.

55. ASECS constitution (1980), ASECS archives, Box 19, folder 21. The same language was used in the job descriptions written for searches to fill the position of executive secretary in 1987 and 1992. Box 2, folder 18; Box 34, folder 3.

56. ASECS Constitution (2011), accessed 24 May 2016, available at *https://asecs.press.jhu.edu/*.