

NASIG Newsletter

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Profile of John Riddick

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Editor's note: It seems fitting that my final profile for the *NASIG Newsletter* would be about John Riddick, the person who recruited me to serve as the organization's first treasurer. I was immediately thrust onto the national serials stage and I have never regretted one minute spent on NASIG activities. I step down as the Profile Column Editor in order to focus my attention on the upcoming NASIG Conference in Buffalo next June. I thank all the willing (and even slightly unwilling) members who allowed me to share their stories with our NASIG readership.

See you in June 2013 in Buffalo!

Editor's note: The *Newsletter* editorial board would like to thank Susan for her service to NASIG.

When I was asked by the NASIG Board to prepare a profile of John Riddick on the occasion of naming the conference student grant award in his honor, my first thought was "this won't be easy." Other subjects for this column have graciously agreed to respond to questions I've put to them and shared some truly interesting stuff about themselves (even from people I "knew" before.) But there's one thing you have to understand about John, and that is he is a very modest man and would likely not cooperate if the attention was going to be about him. What did I do? I used stealth, subterfuge, a little research in the NASIG 10th anniversary files, and contacted a few folks from when NASIG was still in its infancy and someone who worked with John at Central Michigan University.

Library Science Student Grant Committee

My first task was to find out how the student grant award came to exist those many years ago. My own files of board meeting minutes and notes as well as the early newsletter issues do not reveal how the idea came about. I always thought it was Ann Vidor's idea because she chaired the first Library Science Student Grant Committee (formation announced in the June 1987 *NASIG Newsletter*). However, Tina Feick recalls that it was John's idea. In stealth mode, I asked John for help with some NASIG history and inquired about the establishment of the grant. He could not precisely recall because "so much joint participation and sharing of ideas occurred in those [early] days that it is difficult to know precisely at this date where a concept may have originated."

I thought I'd next go to Ann Vidor herself who was at Georgia Tech at the time and is now at Emory University. Her memory is also fuzzy as to the origin of the program, but she recalls being at "a meeting where John and I were both there as were others and we talked about how a library school student could benefit from attending the conference and being able to put it on his/her résumé when applying for first library jobs." The first class of library science student grant winners, six in all, attended the 3rd NASIG Conference at Oglethorpe University in Atlanta in 1988.

The Man

John is married to a psychiatrist and had three children. I cannot recall their names or how many girls or boys, but there was at least one of each! Sadly however, I have since learned that one of his children has passed away. He conducted business the old-fashioned way—by letter, by telephone, or in person. We barely had fax machines in those days, but John sent out many, many personalized letters drumming up interest and memberships for NASIG. And he definitely believed in the power of face-to-face conversation, particularly in a relaxed atmosphere, say with a glass of sherry.

As I mentioned earlier, John is a very modest man with piercing light blue eyes behind somewhat thick glasses. Quoting Becky Lenzini who served as John's co-conspirator (my term) and NASIG co-chair before there was a formal elected structure, "but underneath that calm exterior, he was incredibly determined—he really wanted to get things done and pretty much always succeeded, as far as I can tell." John was the acquisitions librarian at Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant, Michigan when I first met him in January 1984 as part of the inaugural meeting to establish the OCLC Serials Control Subsystems Users Group. The group ultimately dubbed its newsletter, *1113 SCS Users Group Newsletter* (OCLC # 10541520) in honor of John's hotel room number in Washington, DC during ALA Midwinter, because all these fabulous women kept asking the concierge how to find room 1113 on the 1st floor. His room was, of course, not where any of us tried to find it, and he joked about what sort of picture the concierge was forming of this guest, John Riddick. In spite of the colorful beginning (actually it was a terrific ice-breaker!) John quickly got us down to business, and by March we had a newsletter going and held our first public meeting at ALA in Dallas (which led to meeting the fabulous Sylvia Martin who was featured in the profile of retired members in the December 2010 issue <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/nasig/vol25/iss4/12/>). Becky was totally correct in her assessment that when John wanted to get something done, it got done. Another amazing trait John has, though, is the ability to

let go, step aside and allow others carry the torch. More on that later.

John had serious research interests which resulted in the publication of four monographs about the British in India (published by Greenwood Press). He made several trips to England (after 1984) to conduct his research.

Although I do not recall him talking much about it, but I knew he'd gone to college on the GI Bill, John served in the military during the Vietnam era.

NASIG, or He Said in His Best Charlton Heston Voice, "In the Beginning"

In the beginning were some brochures marketing "An International Serials Conference" in April 1984. As has been previously documented in the *NASIG Newsletter* 10th Anniversary special issue (http://www.nasig.org/about_history_10thann_editorial.cfm), John was part of the Class of 1984, the group of American librarians who signed up for a trip that included the 1984 UKSG meeting at the University of Surrey. I asked John if he already had the idea for a North American edition before that trip, to which he indicated that the experiences during that trip—seeing how the various members of the serials information chain might be involved in a single conference or organization—were very important. Later that year, he attended his first Charleston Conference where the idea of multiple types of participants addressing common professional concerns was reinforced. In between those two events, John attended an RTSD Serials Section meeting at ALA Annual in Dallas (the precursor to ALCTS Continuing Resources Section) where the topic of establishing a US-based UKSG-type group was discussed. After that meeting, John drafted letters to Becky Lenzini (then at Faxon) and John Merriman (chair of the UKSG) asking their opinions and advice on whether it would be worthwhile to set up a group to study the possibilities. John collected a cadre of librarians from his various 1984 conference experiences whom he tapped either to participate in the study group, or be part of the inaugural executive council formed after a well-attended and enthusiastic general

information meeting held at DePaul University during the 1985 ALA Annual Conference in Chicago. I asked John how he identified those who became NASIG's "founding fathers and mothers" and he very deftly replied that things kind of snowballed. He relied upon Becky and John Merriman, then drew in Tina Feick, who knew Mary Beth Clack, picked up Leigh Chatterton, myself, and Marilyn Gonsiewski Lewis from the International Serials Conference trip, and Barbara (Bobbi) Carlson from the Charleston Conference, just to name a few who filled some of those early leadership posts. John was elected the first NASIG President in 1986 for the 1986/87 term. He attended the first six conferences as a delegate, returning to celebrate NASIG's 10th anniversary at Duke.

After Tina Feick succeeded John as NASIG President, John stepped back and let the new Board run the show.

He was always supportive but never intrusive. You have to really admire his ability to step aside and let his "child" go forth into the world.

The Legacy

John's legacy is quite simple, the North American Serials Interest Group. Without John's inspiration and driving force, NASIG would not exist. Every successful conference, dialogue between any and all parties in the serials information chain, every student grant winner, and all NASIG activities are a testament to John's vision for an independent organization that promotes communication, understanding and sharing of ideas among all members of the serials information community.