

Reflections on AWSS: Adele Lindenmeyr (AWSS President, 2011-13)

As we approach AWSS's thirtieth anniversary, I would like to add my voice to the others who have contributed to the "Founding Mothers" column in *Women East-West* by recognizing the great influence of AWSS on my professional life. I was a latecomer to the field of women's and gender studies. When I was a graduate student at Princeton University in the 1970s, there was only one woman on the history faculty, and women's history never made even a token appearance in any of my seminars or on any reading list.

It was quite a few years later that I attended the well-known "Akron Conference" on Russian women's history in August 1988, prompted by curiosity and a savvy colleague at Villanova University. I went not to give a paper but to learn; at that point I had little yet to offer that would contribute to this fledgling but exciting new field. The conference inspired me to focus much more on gender in my research on the history of Russian charity, the result of which was the publication in the early 1990s of three articles on women's philanthropy. The lives of women in modern Russian history have been the primary subject of my research and publications ever since. Heartfelt thanks to all the courageous early scholars who overcame colleagues' incomprehension or worse, disdain, to include women and gender in their teaching and writing about Russia, Eastern Europe, and Eurasia. The two-volume bibliography of their works, published by AWSS and M.E. Sharpe in 2007, stands on my bookshelf not only as a reference but also as a kind of shrine to their accomplishments.

After two stints on the AWSS Board in 1996-1998 and 2006-2007, I was elected Vice-President/President-Elect in 2009, and served as President in 2011-2013. By this time, I had gone over to the "dark side," becoming the dean of graduate arts and sciences programs at Villanova, a position that led to my current role as dean of the college. In addition to this administrative experience, my studies of the history of voluntary associations provided me with some insight into what enables an organization that relies solely on members' goodwill to survive and flourish.

Thus as I stepped into the AWSS Presidency with my administrative spectacles on, the first issues I approached were rather mundane, though important. We discovered that the bylaws, dating from 1995, needed to be updated to meet IRS requirements. Yikes! Who wants to run afoul of the IRS?! The membership approved the revised bylaws in November 2011. It was also time to make the difficult change from a printed newsletter to an electronic one. With the invaluable assistance of Kathy Howell, a friend with her own public relations and marketing firm, new co-editors Sally Boniece and Lisa Kirschenbaum, and a patient customer service representative at Constant Contact, we sent the first electronic issue of *Women East-West* to members in 2012. I confess to being still a bit nostalgic for the old printed version, but the change was necessary and inevitable. Finally, as the number of panels at the ASEEES convention multiplied like bunnies, and the price of one hotel boxed lunch soared past \$55, it became increasingly difficult to persuade AWSS members to attend the annual luncheon. In 2012 we replaced our lunchtime awards ceremony and members' gathering with an evening reception. I would like to offer a special salute to Rochelle Ruthchild, the first president of

AWSS and its institutional memory, for her invaluable guidance during the time I served as president.

There were other important issues that we tackled at that time, of course, including the marginalized and perilous position of women's and gender studies abroad, especially in Russia. I was honored to present the AWSS Outstanding Achievement Award in 2011 to Marina Goldovskaya, the extraordinary documentary filmmaker, and to arrange for a showing at ASEES of "A Bitter Taste of Freedom," her 2011 film about the murdered journalist Anna Politkovskaya. In 2013 AWSS sponsored a session that featured a Skype conversation with Ekaterina Samutsevich of Pussy Riot. Recently AWSS provided Judith Pallot and other British colleagues with encouragement and a model to follow for the creation of the Women's Forum within the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies in 2015. Jolly good show, BASEES! In Russia and elsewhere, however, such organizations as the Russian Association of Researchers in Women's History persevere against academic sexism, old-fashioned misogyny, anti-feminism, and anti-westernism. Throughout its history AWSS has done much to encourage scholars in their efforts to bring the study of women and gender into the center of teaching and research. In spite of remarkable progress in our field and the accomplishments of our members and leaders, however, AWSS is needed as much now as it was 30 years ago.