



# K A P P A T A U A L P H A NEWSLETTER

*National Society Honoring Scholarship in Journalism and Mass Communication*

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## Celebrating the scholarly life

“Celebrating the Scholarly Life” is the theme for the 100th anniversary year of Kappa Tau Alpha.

March 10, 2010 is the official 100th birthday, but the Society and its 93 chapters will observe the anniversary throughout the year.

A ceremony commemorating the birthday will be held March 10 at the University of Missouri where the Society was founded.

A highlight of the year will be a panel entitled “Kappa Tau Alpha Centennial: Celebrating the Scholarly Life” at the AEJMC convention in Denver in August. The panel will showcase outstanding scholars in our field who have demonstrated lifelong excellence in research as well as a commitment to fostering and nurturing academic excellence in their students. The panelists will bring exceptional expertise in a different aspect of journalism/mass communication scholarship. They have been invited to talk about the rewards and challenges of a life of intellectual inquiry and about their experiences working with students to ensure that academic excellence continues to thrive.

Panelists include Maurine Beasley (Maryland), Jay Black (South Florida), Esther Thorson (Missouri), Donald Shaw (North Carolina) and David Weaver

### Former KTA President Al Scroggins dies

Al Scroggins, dean *emeritus* at South Carolina, died Nov. 21. He was 89. Scroggins was the founder of the South Carolina chapter and served as adviser until his retirement in 1985. He was president of KTA in 1972-74. The Albert T. Scroggins Chapter at South Carolina was named in his honor in 2000. He was initiated into KTA at the University of Missouri in 1956.

(Indiana). The panel is co-sponsored by the CTM Division and the Council of Affiliates.

The AEJMC convention registration form will include a place to mark if you are a member of KTA. Special ribbons noting “KTA 100” will be attached to the name badges of those who check.

KTA will sponsor the tote bags for the convention and will have an exhibit table along with the numerous publishers and vendors. The annual KTA/AEJMC Awards Luncheon will also highlight the 100th anniversary.

New members inducted in 2010 will receive special 100th anniversary notation on their certificates.

Chapters are expected to generate publicity to make others on the campus aware of KTA. Among suggested chapter activities: a reception for students and faculty in your program; an essay contest regarding academic achievement, ethics, honor, etc.; create a KTA Hall of Fame recognizing a small number of outstanding alumni of your chapter; write the history of your chapter; present the university president with a plaque commemorating the founding of your chapter; donate a bench, marker, light post, tree or similar gift to the campus recognizing the search for “Knowledge, Truth and Accuracy,” Kappa Tau Alpha’s guiding principles.

## *Miami, Middle Tennessee awarded KTA chapters*

Middle Tennessee State University and the University of Miami have been approved for chapters.

Miami is a private research university with more than 15,000 students located in Coral Gables FL.

The School of Communication will mark its 25th birthday in 2010. In 2006, the School revised its mission to embrace a more global perspective on communication research and study.

The program has about 1240 undergraduate students studying in nine concentration areas and 110 graduate students working toward masters and doctoral degrees.

Students in all but two of the concentration areas will automatically meet membership requirements but those in Communication Studies and Motion Pictures will need to complete nine hours of professional j/mc courses.

Middle Tennessee State University is located in Murfreesboro. The university will celebrate its 100th birthday in 2011. Its enrollment topped 24,000 for the first time this fall. *Forbes* named it one of the top 50 “best buys” in university education.

The journalism program was approved in 1971, culminating an initiative by university president M.G. Scarlett, a former journalism professor. The School of Journalism is one of three units in the College of Mass Communication.

About 700 undergraduate students major in sequences in news/magazine, public relations, advertising and media design.

MTSU is home to the Seigenthaler Chair of Excellence in First Amendment Studies, named for John Seigenthaler Sr., long-time editor, publisher and president of the Nashville *Tennessean*.

# KTA at 99 panel highlights Boston convention

Interdisciplinary and imaginative scholarship that answers the big questions was the focus of an AEJMC panel sponsored jointly by the History Division and the Council of Affiliates at this year's Boston convention. The panel was an early celebration of Kappa Tau Alpha's 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2010.

Five distinguished scholars fulfilled a sweeping and ambitious mandate: exploring the rich and evolving state of scholarship in journalism and mass communication since the founding in 1910 of KTA, the national journalism/mass communication honor society. KTA is the seventh oldest honor society and the one with the highest admissions standards.

The widely published panelists discussing "KTA at 99: Promoting Scholarship from 1910 into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," were: Jeff Smith (Wisconsin-Milwaukee), W. Joseph Campbell (American), Janice Hume (Georgia), Phil Glende (Wisconsin-Madison) and Kathy Forde (South Carolina).

Prof. Smith, this year's winner of the History Division's Covert Award, began by talking about prehistory or "what prefigured what we now think of as scholarly work, particularly the moral criticism of the press." He explored the roots of critical thinking about press performance in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, much of it coming from college presidents. Harvard's Charles Eliot, for example, wrote in *The Happy Life* (1896) that "newspapers were serious obstacles to contentment because their stories concentrated on abnormal evils rather than normal joys."

While journalism was first a topic of criticism, it eventually became part of formal education and research as thought leaders in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century recognized its importance in a democracy, according to Prof. Smith.

Wisconsin's pioneering journalism professor Willard Bleyer became the leading advocate of research, ethics and a liberal arts focus for journalism education. And Fred Siebert (Illinois and Michigan State) later became the torch bearer for academic research in the field, followed by Frank Luther Mott (Missouri), KTA's first executive director.

"I think we could use more research on how the media are suffused

*Award-winning scholars discussed journal research past and future in Boston. Karen List, former KTA president and History Division Chair, moderated. Here, List summarizes the discussions. Reprinted with permission of Clio.*

with moral standards, high or low," Prof. Smith said. "Universities once did ponder the big questions. The opportunities are out there."

Prof. Campbell, this year's winner of the KTA Taft Outstanding Advisor Award, discussed enduring themes in mass communication research. A decade after KTA's founding, he said, there were already 200 schools teaching journalism and presumably journalism professors doing research.

"What does a quick trip down memory lane tell us about research in our field?" Prof. Campbell asked. His answer:

--the descriptive tradition, lacking an analytical patina, runs deep;

--complacency in methodology is far too common, and

--early recurring--and predictable--themes included larger-than-life figures, the Civil War press and the role and status of women in the field, while more recent topics have included civic journalism, blogging and framing.

Prof. Campbell recommended that 21<sup>st</sup> century research should break out of these predictable patterns, experiment with fresh topics and imaginative methodologies, shun fads and address the big questions. "So what?" must be answered."

Prof. Hume, co-winner of the 2008 Covert Award, talked about the evolution of scholarship in media and collective memory. She defined collective memory as "that body of beliefs about the past that inform a social group, community, region, or nation's present and future."

Memory sites can include museums, monuments, markers, folksongs and film, but most people, she said, understand the past largely through mass media: "Journalism is a cultural memory site."

George Washington, for example, was remembered as a heroic god in the early republic, Prof. Hume explained, but during the Depression it was his inventiveness

that was recalled. "Washington is dead and buried and hasn't changed a wit," she said, "so the question becomes: how do we need to remember him?"

Prof. Hume cited a growing body of work on identity, reputation and memory distortion. "There is much work to be done," she said. "What about digital memory? How are new media shaping our contemporary culture?"

Prof. Glende, 2007 winner of the Warren Price Award for the History Division's best student paper and this year's Moroney Award for postal history scholarship, focused on research on the human dimensions of media production.

"Too often, in early scholarship, the personal backgrounds and attitudes of reporters were written off as unimportant because reporters were guided by 'objectivity' or, more recently, bound by institutional hegemony," he said.

Many of the earliest works on reporting fell into one of four categories: memoir, collections of published works, how-to books or how-not-to critiques. But "personal stories of individual reporters are part of the fabric of the news report" and must be studied as well.

Journalism historians, Prof. Glende argued, should look at the backgrounds of reporters, editors and publishers. Sacred cows, deadlines, production expectations and multi-tasking must be considered as well as the fact that reporters are affected by their work environments, cultural norms, economic imperatives, personal backgrounds, professional expectations and the audience.

"The most promising research on news content embraces ambiguity and draws from multiple disciplines," he said, "such as psychology, sociology, quantitative and qualitative studies, political economy and a host of other fields that place media work within an ecological environment."

Finally, Prof. Forde, winner of the 2006 Nafziger-White dissertation award and this year's KTA-Mott Book Award for *Literary Journalism on Trial*, talked about her primary research focus: libel law and freedom of speech in a democracy.

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records and all of the case opinions in the case, allowed me to document the public life of the case over time, as well as the changing nature of the public and legal discourse about the case.

Another aspect of the primary source work was particularly challenging: the analysis of changing conceptions and legal formulations of truth in the line of U.S. Supreme Court libel cases stretching from *New York Times v. Sullivan* to *Masson v. New Yorker*. I returned to it again and again long after the dissertation had been defended as I attempted to refine my understanding and argument further. Mastering the doctrinal and procedural elements of libel jurisprudence is challenging. Trying to understand changing notions of truth in libel law—and to represent these notions of truth in accessible and clear language—was exceptionally challenging. The chapter on this subject was by far the most difficult to write.

One of the smartest things I did while working on my book chapters was asking respected colleagues in the field to read and critique chapters. Their generosity

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## Panel: KTA at 99

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Thinking on libel law, Prof. Ford argued, has had a profound effect on "how democracy works and should be shaped." Early 20th century discussion of the relationship among democracy, the courts and the media show that "scholarship matters profoundly," she said.

Prof. Ford noted Zechariah Chafee's influence on Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes who argued in his Abrams dissent for a "free trade of ideas" and talked of the power of speech to get itself accepted in the marketplace. That dissent established the groundwork for the Supreme Court in the 1964 case *NY Times v. Sullivan* to repudiate the notion of seditious libel and clear the way for "uninhibited, robust and wide open" debate on which democracy depends.

Scholars must be prepared for their work to be contested, she argued, because "ideas matter," as shown by the wide ranging scholarship supported recognized by KTA through its 99 years.

and expertise pushed me to think harder and to write a better book. I forever owe these friends a debt of gratitude (I acknowledge them in the book's introduction).

I learned a lot in the writing of this book. I learned how much I need—and how grateful I am for—the intellectual and emotional support of my family, friends and colleagues when I'm working on a major

## 2009 National

The annual meeting of the National Council of Kappa Tau Alpha was held August 6, 2009 at the Boston Sheraton Hotel. Jane Singer (Iowa) presided. Vice President Joe Campbell (American), Exec Director Keith Sanders (Missouri), and 18 other chapter advisers attended.

Singer thanked Campbell for organizing the "KTA at 99: Promoting Scholarship from 1910 into the 21st Century" panel scheduled for later in the afternoon. She welcomed new chapter advisers Holly Hall (Arkansas State), Chip Stewart (TCU), Jisu Huh (Minnesota) and Brian Johnson (Illinois). She congratulated Jim Scotton on release of his book *New Media in New China* (which was partly funded by a Chapter Advisers Research Grant) and Campbell for earning the Taft Outstanding Adviser Award. She urged

piece of scholarship. I learned how much I enjoy and value archival and primary source-driven historical research. I learned that understanding the past is hard and that our knowledge of the past is always contingent. I was reminded, as I have been repeatedly reminded throughout my life, that there is much I do not know and that I will always have much to learn.

## Council Meeting

advisers to pass on ideas on how to celebrate on campuses by using our Facebook, KTA, group.

Keith Sanders presented a financial report and budget proposal. The budget for 2009-10 includes \$8,000 for the centennial. The budget was approved.

Sanders distributed copies of his annual Executive Director's Report. He noted that the Society remains in excellent financial shape; the Executive Committee is working with Jennifer McGill at AEJMC to sponsor the 2010 convention tote bags and badge ribbons indicating KTA membership.

Singer led discussion about ideas on how to celebrate the anniversary on individual campuses. She noted that a webinar is tentatively scheduled for the 100th anniversary on March 10, 2010.

Singer adjourned the meeting.

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## Mendelson, Patterson receive research Grants

Andy Mendelson (Temple) and Maggie Patterson (Duchesne) have been awarded \$1000 KTA Chapter Adviser Research Grants for 2009-2010.

Mendelson will use his grant to "trace the legacy of genre painting in newspapers and magazines over the past 150 years, from illustrations to photographs by professional photographers to its most recent incarnation in digital photographs by amateur photographers posted to news websites."

Patterson will study the widely distributed video of the death of Neda Agha-Soltan on a Tehran street to gain insight about how iconic images carried by new media are able to break through barriers created by governments that historically have blocked traditional news media. The study will compare images of China's "Tank Man" with Iran's Neda.



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# Creating *Literary Journalism*

Kathy Roberts Forde received the Frank Luther Mott / Kappa Tau Alpha Research Award for the best research-based book on journalism/mass communication published in 2008. Here, Forde reflects on researching and writing her winning book.

*Literary Journalism on Trial: Masson v. New Yorker and the First Amendment* is the history of a First Amendment libel case. It is also a social and cultural history of two journalistic traditions in America—the literary and the objectivist and of libel law. It is an exploration of varying philosophies and conceptions of truth-telling in American law, society, and public discourse. And finally, it is a call to journalists and journalism historians to come more fully to terms with the postmodern challenge to objectivist knowledge claims in their professional work. Writing the book was challenging, intellectually stimulating, and humbling work.

Before it was a book *Literary Journalism on Trial* was a dissertation. Revising the dissertation for book publication was time-consuming work. The book version is, I think (I hope!), smarter and stronger than the dissertation. The historical argument is more nuanced and sophisticated; the historical contextualization is more robust and depends on a broader range of historical literature; the writing is more finely crafted; and the chapters are better organized.

But as much work as these substantive revisions were, it might have been worse. My dissertation, like some historical dissertations written in mass communication graduate programs, might have had a particular kind of academic architecture that required dismantling, even demolition, before the manuscript could become a book: the literature review, the methods chapter, the findings chapters.

Book-length works of professional history are conventionally built with a particular kind of academic architecture—endnotes (including explanatory notes and historiographic notes), bibliographies, indexes. They typically don't have social science-style chapters providing exhaustive literature reviews or pedantic discussions of historical method. Instead, their chapters

forward the work's historical argument and narrative, ideally in a sensible, engaging, and intellectually sound manner. I asked my dissertation adviser and committee members if they would allow me to write my dissertation as if it were a historical monograph. They agreed, and I am forever grateful. The freedom they gave me led to an invaluable learning experience—an experience I wish for all graduate students writing historical dissertations. As I was writing my dissertation, it turns out I was learning how to write a book.

I was hardly an autodidact, though. As I undertook the archival and primary source research and analysis my project required, and began planning my chapters, I analyzed the structure of several

**"The oral histories helped me understand the case much more fully."**

book-length professional histories I particularly admired. For example, Anthony Lewis's brilliant history of *New York Times v. Sullivan*, *Make No Law*, showed me how I could write the history of the First Amendment case by following the life of the case through the court system and the public sphere, analyzing the historical development of the relevant jurisprudence, and trying to understand the case issues and outcomes in historical context. Lewis's book also served as an example of monographic history that beautifully combines argument, narrative, and an engaging prose style. Robert Westbrook's intellectual biography of John Dewey helped me think about how to approach the parts of my project that involved intellectual history. I studied historical monographs to learn how a range of historians use introductory chapters for a range of intellectual and utilitarian purposes. I read broadly in the philosophy and methodology of history. For inspiration and practical guidance, I read and re-read Susan Rabiner and Alfred Fortunato's wonderful primer *Thinking Like Your Editor: How to Write Great Serious Nonfiction—and Get It Published*

and consulted other works providing advice on academic book publishing.

Thinking of my dissertation as a book the entire time I was researching and writing helped me take myself seriously as a scholar-in-the-making. It helped me imagine that I might actually one day be a real scholar. Doing archival work in the grand reading room of the New York Public Library helped, too. Part of my historical project involved an examination of the magazine's management of the threat of libel law over time. This research involved substantial archival work in the magazine's institutional records housed at the New York Public Library, which took many weeks and several trips to the city (I have a young child and was not comfortable being away from home for long periods of time doing research). Reading through editorial correspondence, libel complaints, internal memoranda among editors, publishers, writers, and legal counsel—it was engrossing work. I enjoyed getting to know the magazine's editors and writers and learning how they dealt with important concerns about libel, freedom of expression, reporting, and ethics. I enjoyed learning how these strategies developed and changed over time and puzzling out the effects and consequences. I enjoyed discovering fascinating stories about an alleged mobster, an eminent Western philosopher, a possibly mentally disturbed "cat woman," and a former child genius—all of whom complained they had been libeled in the pages of the magazine.

Another particularly engaging part of the research was the oral histories I conducted with key participants in the *Masson* case. I spoke with several lawyers who had worked the case at different times during its twelve-year travels through the up and down the federal court ladder, as well as Jeffrey Masson, who filed the libel complaint against the magazine and the writer Janet Malcolm (Malcolm declined to speak with me). These oral histories helped me understand the case—its personal, legal, social, and cultural dimensions—much more fully.

Press coverage of the case, along with review of a great deal of the court

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