

THE SASHT: PERSONAL MEMORIES, IMAGINARIES AND REALITIES

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It was in 1994, I remember, after some years of involvement and membership in the less-than-a-decade-old South African Society for History Teaching, that I was “nominated” to become the secretary of the SASHT. It was no extraordinary formality. Most probably it could be viewed as a one-way prior-to-conference decision-making by the leadership to ensure no difficulty at the SASHT General Meeting when it would be announced that a volunteer was needed to fill the secretary position. All those present – I remember about 50 to 60 then – “gladly” took note of the “volunteer”, thereby implying that the activities of the SASHT at least would be assured of continuity. I do remember, at the 1994 GM, that the author of *All that glitters*, Emelia Potenza, dryly observed that the stereotype of having only a woman in the position of secretary should be changed. I cannot remember if the leadership responded to this remark, but it made an impression on me as a 34-year-old. I was tasked to take over from Dr Maritz Broodryk from the erstwhile University of Port Elizabeth. With a PhD in Regional History Studies awarded in 1993, I had in some way only departed with my higher education career. I was excited to also help make a difference in the newly established democratic South Africa.

Somehow life’s odds always seem to have been pulling against the academic dreams and wishes I aspired to. What educators and historians thought would be a “spring” for History after 1994, turned out to be a battle for disciplinary survival. A new educational dispensation and ideas about History in the broader domain have allowed for some challenging years – also for the SASHT. In 1996 the SASHT mouthpiece, the journal *Yesterday and Today* (as it was written then), published its last issue under Prof Pieter H Kapp from the University of Stellenbosch. A lack of interest and educators not renewing their subscription fees mainly led to this solo decision-making. I cannot remember if the broader leadership had been consulted and if any of the rest of the

executive had been approached to take up the challenge of taking over the Y&T editorship. Be it as it may, the leadership since then has also frequently changed while the SASHT struggled to host its biennial conferences as a result of no interest, probably no trust in the “Afrikaner” perceived initiative, and most definitely a bag full of other perceptions, realities and imaginaries about people leading the SASHT: The country’s political record related to the past in which History was viewed as a major culprit, and the in-the-mind labelling of historians at tertiary institutions as being ideologically linked to apartheid or ideologically opposing apartheid ... even if that was only imaginary (as we know now in more realistic terms 23 years later). Because of perceptions and stereotypes, therefore, so it seems, some individuals were embraced in the new dispensation while others felt marginalised but certainly not less enthusiastic about History and history teaching.

With a few mainstays in the SASHT like Mr Jimmy Verner and Prof Rob Siebörger and some years later, also Dr Pieter Warnich of the NWU (who hosted a very successful SASHT conference in Potchefstroom in 2006), the Society has indeed pulled through since 1997 to 2005, despite the loss of a few anchors who were associated with the Society, such as Prof Martin Trümpelmann of the Rand Afrikaans University (currently known as the University of Johannesburg). This continuity in difficult times for History was also made possible by continuing to organise conferences; distributing a quarterly information brochure (hard copy and electronic); voicing the Society’s concerns to the 20-30 or so active members and also the several other “dormant” acting members. At the time, and at all times, some members were also involved in the writing of school textbooks. Efforts to establish healthy cooperation with the Department of Education seemed to have reached a pinnacle in 2006 when the SASHT, with the financial support made possible by the outgoing Dr Nishana Parsard of the Gauteng DoE, organised a workshop in Vanderbijlpark for more than 100 History teachers under the appropriate title “Empowering the History teacher”. I remember how the recently 2017-elected executive, Michelle Friedman (who had been a speaker on resources during one of the 2006 workshop sessions) battled to find the venue through Vanderbijlpark’s maze of boulevards, but the wait with a longer tea session was worth the while. I also remember Rika Odendaal’s presence at the workshop, and today she is a solid pillar in the SASHT team and manages the SASHT website as well as the national SASHT quiz, entitled: *Made SA*.

The years 2005-2006 can indeed be seen as a milestone and turn-around-time for the SASHT. The SASHT “executive” (by then still not in a strong and very constitutionally structured position to properly organise annual elections, but Mr Jimmy Verner efficiently managed as chair up to 2008), continued its pro-activeness by starting the first website for a History Society in South Africa. A few initiatives thereafter have turned around the Society profile and position. The first of many initiatives was to re-instate the *Yesterday&Today* journal in 2006 by publishing a special issue. The financial support from the North-West

University to ensure that the 10-year dormant journal would be resurrected properly should not be underestimated. After six years of publishing well-researched articles and very informative hands-on articles the Society was granted accreditation by the DoE and gained the support of the quality gate-keeper body, the Academy of Science of South Africa (Assaf).

Since 2005 the biennial SASHT conferences have paved the way for hosting annual conferences. I took over from Jimmy as Chair of the Society in 2009 when the SASHT Executive exercised their vote and, in fact, all started to become more involved. At this point in time it was Patrick McMahon of Crawford College, and already involved for some years, who hopped on the SASHT “bus” and has since been a committed companion in the SASHT executive. Not only did he maintain the website for many years, but has he also ensured continuity on the SASHT facebook page after Mathew Marwick of Maritzburg College’s passionate initiatives in this regard in 2013. Patrick (and Jimmy) annually assisted Rika with up-to-date questions for the *Made SA* quiz. Pieter Warnich also took over the *Yesterday&Today* editorial task from me, which absolutely helped me to also be able to pay attention to other SASHT matters.

The SASHT thrives on passionate educators of History who have been willing to give that extra time, not for the record and win-a-medal-time, but to serve fellow colleagues, the community and our children in lecture halls. In this regard it would be a sin to proceed to any thought of the SASHT after 2010 without thinking of Ms Henriette Lubbe of Unisa who, with very hard work and an outstanding efficiency and a warm personality, was in 2011 able to embrace the cultural representativeness of South Africa at that year’s conference in Benoni, Gauteng, entitled “Youth and History”. Since 2012 the SASHT has travelled all over the country: To the Western Cape, KZN, Limpopo and the Eastern Cape to host conferences with the kind assistance of executive members. Personally meeting with former political activist and motivational speaker as keynote at the SASHT conference in Limpopo in 2015, Mr Barney Pityana, will always incite special memories.

With Henriette as Deputy Chair of the Society since the 2011 election the activities of the elected regional representatives have been reported on regularly and well supported. To me it was an eye-opener to have become acquainted with so many initiatives on the ground with regard to the education of History. Some outstanding and notable SASHT “infantry”, if I will be forgiven for making distinctions in this regard, are Limpopo’s representative and SASHT executive member, Mr Jake Manenzhe, as well as Mr Barry Firth of the Western Cape, from 2017 the newly elected SASHT President (the SASHT recently spontaneously did away with the word “Chair”). I will always fondly carry a very special memory of Barry, travelling to conferences on his motor bike, no matter how far. This is a wow and inspiring!

In looking back, after 25 years of official involvement (but I can also testify to being “around”, assisting and observing even prior to 1992 and in the pioneering days of the Society), I will always remember the regular, active and supportive SASHT members who participated (and still do!) in conferences and debates on contentious issues. The membership of close to a 100 nowadays, has picked up again since 1994 and it is hoped that its strength, inside and outside official membership boundaries, will escalate to benefit the Society and its doings for the sake of quality education in History. Today the SASHT has a healthy bank balance, and has as a result, as in the past, also been able to support needy members and supporters to attend conferences and host workshops. The *Yesterday&Today* journal has progressed to be an outstanding academic publication and internationally its visibility and usability reflect in the statistics. In 2017 the SASHT also hosted the conference of the International Society of History Didactics in South Africa as a first for Southern Africa. History education and the educators of History in South Africa are indeed well on course and I am proud to have been part of it so far and hope to be for as long as possible in the future. Proudly South African I will always be! I am equally excited about the newly elected SASHT executive under the guidance of Barry Firth (President) and Pieter Warnich (vice-President) who will take the Society’s vision and mission into a new era of creative initiatives. My warm blessings and good wishes to all those on this very special bus that will continue moving forward with efficient navigators.