

# **An Introduction to a History of the Academy of Rehabilitative Audiology: 1966-1976**

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When a professional organization comes into existence, the excitement of starting something new, as well as the need to work out of one's hip pocket, precludes giving any thought to maintaining records of yearly activities. With a desire to get things done, the saving of correspondence and the orderly transfer of records goes begging. Very few of those involved have the feeling that what they are doing is so important that there is a need to record every minute of what is happening for posterity.

The first years of the Academy of Rehabilitative Audiology (ARA) were typified by such an orientation. Those involved in its early activities now have the fog of time obscuring their memories of what actually did happen in 1966, 1967 or 1968. I recall that sometime during the first couple years of the Academy's existence, Deno Reed, in a casual aside, said that he would be willing to serve as historian or archivist. As I recall, the reaction to his offer was, "Well if you want to do it, fine, but I don't think we will have much for you to do." I should add that Deno was never appointed to such a position.

When the Academy's tenth anniversary rolled around in 1976, members of the organization were still relying on the memories of four or five people to recall what had happened in the "good old early days." A few voices were heard suggesting that some effort should be made to document the early history or there should be some organized method to collect materials from the various ARA officers as they finished their terms of office. Further, it was suggested that it would be highly desirable to have such material stored in one central location. If such a collection existed, someone might be willing to organize the material and might even try to write up something! In the spring of 1977, Roger Kasten, then serving as ARA President, wrote to members of the ARA Executive Committee, "It is critical that we attempt to assemble our

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Academy records in one central location. We are presently in very shaky shape in terms of the background of our organization and this item is going to have to be considered in detail in our meeting." There was some discussion at that spring Executive Committee meeting about the problem, including some noble, high blown suggestions such as a possible national office or a full time secretary. All of the talk went for naught when the Academy's bank account was analyzed.

In 1978 the Executive Committee began to seriously consider the appointment of an historian. Gretchen Skalbeck was asked to take such a position. In her typically modest, self-effacing way she asked, "Couldn't you find anyone else?" Regardless of such verbalizations, her selection was the result of considerable thought and she was the only person considered. A brief bit of history might be in order to account for the selection of Gretchen. She had been in correspondence with Roger Kasten concerning the activities of a hearing aid manufacturer who had been developing materials about aural rehabilitation for hearing aid dealers. Roger had suggested that she might assume responsibilities for overseeing development of a program of direct dissemination of informational items by the Academy. This interest in informational activities, plus her enthusiastic participation in ARA Summer Institutes, her genuine interest in ARA, and her appreciation of a well turned phrase, insured her selection.

After Gretchen caught the curve ball thrown to her by the Executive Committee, I would imagine the first question she asked after "Why me?" was "Where do I start?" She started by asking the early Academy officers for any memories or materials they might have that would be of help to her. Some individuals were a great deal of help, others had disposed of their materials, and others had no memories they wanted to share. I received a letter from her that had several questions such as the following: "Puzzle number two is Frank Nasca. He was the Newsletter editor but did not appear on membership rosters." Gretchen labored at collecting background material, and when I saw the first draft of her efforts I was amazed at how much information she had been able to retrieve. Also, I was quite taken with her writing style, especially her efforts to tie Academy events with national and international events that were occurring at the same time.

In 1981 the position of archivist was approved, and since I could promise the use of several empty file cabinet drawers at the University of Illinois, I was appointed to the position. I soon received a batch of materials from Tina Bangs, John Cooper and Dodie Stein, and a letter or two from Gretchen. Gretchen had circulated a first "historical" draft in 1981 with the following comment, "There may be too much of my opinion used to embroider a very bare cloth for the early years." In the summer of 1983 she forwarded what she labeled as her "final effort" for the period 1966-1976. I contacted Frank Caccamise, in his role as editor of the *Journal of the Academy of Rehabilitative Audiology (JARA)*, and asked if he had any suggestions as to how we

should proceed with processing of the manuscript. Herb Oyer and I volunteered to review the manuscript and determine if any significant items were omitted or if some items should receive further elaboration. On a beautiful fall weekend in 1983, Herb and I met at John Black's "other" home in Veadersburg, Indiana, to review Gretchen's "historical" manuscript. Both of us felt the manuscript should be published in one form or another. As usual, however, we did not agree completely. Herb felt there should be some change in the writing style, while I liked the approach that had been taken. We gathered in our suggestions and forwarded them to Frank Caccamise, who presented our suggestions and copies of the manuscript to members of the Executive Committee. It was recommended that they review the manuscript and be ready to make recommendations at the 1984 ARA Summer Institute. Based on discussion by the Executive Committee at this Summer Institute, it was recommended that the manuscript be published in the next issue of *JARA* and that as archivist I should prepare a continuation of the history from 1976 to the present.

I trust that you will find the material Gretchen prepared interesting and that you will delight in the style in which she has organized and presented the history of ARA. And, Gretchen, hopefully we have answered your statement (in a June, 1982 letter to me) that so many famous historians have said to themselves, "I really can't imagine who will ever read what I've written." Thank you for helping to defog our obscured memories.