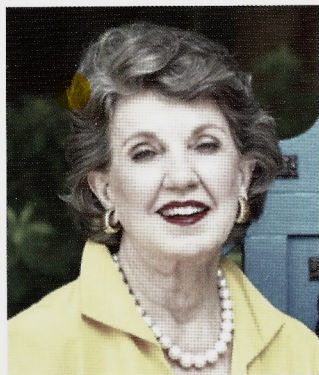


Historical Literacy and the SCHS



Since grade school, Dan Ravenel has known more about South Carolina history than most college graduates do today. For more than twelve years, Dan dedicated his time and resources to our society, and as president, he was simply outstanding. At the society's 165th Annual Meeting on June 11, Dan

stepped into the footprints of past presidents such as Walter Edgar, Tom Tisdale, Malinda Coleman, Paul Trouche, Bill Kinney, and Bill Cain. If you want to “talk history” with any one of them, you had better know what you are talking about, for they do.

It seems that the annual meeting occurred at the exact moment there is a national crisis of historical ignorance colliding with a desperate need for historical literacy. I am not about to suggest that historical literacy can solve all our problems, but I will say that literacy is a priceless tool for understanding how, from where we began, we got to where we are today. If we forget or ignore our history, we will lose our way.

South Carolina is a diverse state full of intertwined roots. And because we are a diverse people, we have more opinions per square foot than any other state in the union. But every difference of opinion isn't necessarily a difference of principle. You can name any crisis of any kind over the last 350 years, and we have endured it.

Since the founding of the colony, our history has been recorded from a multitude of perspectives. Most were different, and most were true.

Then, the unthinkable happened in the last century. Many Americans began to belittle and then to abandon the study of history. Without historical literacy, we lost the clarity of hindsight and the wisdom it brings.

As members of the SCHS, we know that the society never attempts to interpret history. Historian Michael Beschloss spoke in Greenville last fall, and he warned his audience that it will take fifty years before historians can correctly interpret the consequences of contemporary attitudes and choices.

While the SCHS is politically non-ideological and doesn't try to tell us what to think, it does use its archives to tell stories that allow each of us to draw lessons from the past. The SCHS has proven to be a champion of diversity because it highlights our history from a chorus of voices.

The collection reflects the uniqueness of men, women, and children who were European Americans,

African Americans, and Native Americans. It reflects changes in our state's culture, politics, and opinions over the last 350 years. It also proves that times don't change, but people do.

CEO Faye Jensen has taken the society outside the walls of the Fireproof Building and the Addlestone Library. The Winter Lecture Series and Speaker Series, the Fall Tour, the *Carologue*, and the *South Carolina Historical Magazine* are some of the ways the society has delivered historical literacy to every corner of the state.

In addition, we have benefited from countless SCHS board members who have dedicated themselves to historical literacy. For years, Larry Rowland, John McCardell, Bernie Powers, David Shi, Wink Prince, Richard Porcher, Courtney Tollison Hartness, William McKinney, Bill Davies, Alec Taylor, Walter Edgar, A.V. Huff, and more have educated us through their publications and lectures.

On the national level, no one speaks with a voice of authority on education more eloquently than our beloved former governor and secretary of education Dick Riley. What a joy it was at the annual meeting to hear him express his passion for historical literacy.

But what about the rest of us? What compels you and me to support the SCHS during this crisis of values? What can we do to mount a frontal assault against historical amnesia? Well, if every single member of the SCHS seriously considered these six suggestions, we could, by our participation, significantly elevate the society and its mission throughout our state:

1. Increase *by one level* your own SCHS membership.
2. Increase statewide memberships by reminding your friends, relatives, and neighbors of the SCHS's role in education. And if their eyes glaze over at the word “history,” you are talking to the wrong person.
3. Donate SCHS memberships to your children, your grandchildren, and every child in your neighborhood. Tell them why history is important.
4. Actively participate in the educational opportunities offered by the society. Attend the Fall Tour and the Winter Lecture Series—virtually or in person.
5. Read. The average American reads for less than nineteen minutes a day. Reading is not a luxury; it is a vital necessity. Emotions run high when facts are low.
6. You just might be that particular kind of person who is able to invest significant corporate and/or private resources in the SCHS. A generous gift from just one individual has the potential to transform the society into the cultural and educational leader we need so desperately today.

—Emilyn C. Sanders, SCHS Chair