

John A. Diemer

2020 Gerald M. and Sue T. Friedman Distinguished Service Award

I am honored and delighted to have been selected for the 2020 Gerald M. and Sue T. Friedman Distinguished Service Award. I am very grateful to Kathy Lohff for her warm letter of support and to the other officers of the division who confirmed her nomination. As Kathy mentioned, we have spent many hours working together to promote the History and Philosophy of Geology Division (HPGD) at the Annual GSA meetings, not only by staffing the division's booth but also by participating in division-sponsored topical sessions, the annual reception for students and friends of the division, and the occasional fieldtrip (and yes some of those have been to Tiki bars!) We have also served at various times as officers of the division. It was with some trepidation that I entered the division's officer rotation in 2008, but was persuaded by Stephen Rowland that it would provide many opportunities for professional growth. His prediction has been fully born out by later events and I thank him for providing the encouragement to take that step. In addition to our work for HPGD, I have collaborated closely with Kathy since 2014 in producing the journal *Earth Sciences History*, published by our associated society, the History of Earth Sciences Society (HESS). Kathy admirably performs the essential jobs of maintaining the membership lists and handling subscription renewals.

My interest in the history of geology, was sparked more than 30 years ago when Michael Collie asked me why is 'Old Red Sandstone' sometimes written as 'old red sandstone'? It turned out that he was working on a bibliographic analysis of the publications of Thomas Henry Huxley in which he came across a correspondence between Huxley and the Reverend George Gordon of Golspie, held in the archives of the Elgin Museum in Moray, Scotland. Their correspondence concerned previously undescribed reptilian fossils that came from strata assigned to what was variously referred to as 'Old Red Sandstone' or 'old red sandstone'. Having done a PhD on the Old Red Sandstone of Kerry Head in southwest Ireland, I became interested in this stratigraphic and terminological puzzle. After all, the Old Red Sandstone is Devonian in age whereas the oldest reptilian fossils then known came from the Permo-Triassic 'New Red Sandstone'. In investigating this question further, we learned from Christine Sangster, the archivist, that the Elgin Museum also held several letters on bee-keeping from Darwin and more than fifty letters between the Rev. George Gordon and Roderick Murchison. George Gordon had the habit of writing and preserving first drafts of his letters so that when the replies from Murchison arrived, Gordon had in hand both sides of the correspondence. The task of transcribing the barely legible scrawls of both men, and annotating the correspondence to make sense of what they were discussing, was surprisingly pleasurable and resulted in our first co-authored book entitled *Murchison in Moray: A Geologist on Home Ground*, published by the American Philosophical Society in 1995.

As we were working on this project, I presented our first joint paper at the GSA Annual Meeting in Cincinnati in 1992 at a session chaired by Ellis Yochelson. He wondered if the Elgin Sandstones that featured in the title of the talk were related to the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum, but I had to inform him that they were related in name only. It was also at about that time that I joined the History of Geology Division (as it was then known) and soon after participated in the GSA Penrose conference held in San Diego in 1994 that examined the history of geology from the inside and the outside. That conference clearly demonstrated the various

perspectives that can be applied to the study of the history of geology. My burgeoning interest in the history of geology prompted an application for the position of faculty director of the UNC Charlotte-Kingston University exchange program for the 1994-1995 academic year. During that year in Britain, I was fortunate to work in several archives, including those of the Geological Society, the British Geological Survey, and the University of Edinburgh. While working in the BGS archives, I had the good fortune of meeting Graham McKenna who made available many primary Murchison sources. He also pointed me in the direction of the 26-volume autobiographical journal compiled by Murchison as a source of information concerning the Elgin reptiles. That suggestion ultimately led to the publication of our second book, an annotated edition of six of those volumes entitled *Murchison's Wanderings in Russia*, published by the British Geological Survey in 2004. The research that led to the book provided a wealth of information and spin-off projects that I have continued to publish on in the ensuing years.

It is perhaps on the basis of the editorial work central to both books that Sandra Herbert, President of HESS from 2013–2014, extended the offer to become the editor of *Earth Sciences History*. I remain very grateful that she made that offer. I began my duties as editor of *Earth Sciences History* in 2014, having succeeded David Oldroyd, and have enjoyed the experience immensely, particularly by having the opportunity to correspond with historians of the earth sciences across the world. International connections have been enhanced greatly by becoming a member of the IUGS International Commission on the History of Geological Sciences (INHIGEO) in 2012, thanks to the nominations of Greg Good, Kenneth Taylor and Ken Bork. Since becoming a member, I have participated in many INHIGEO meetings including Manchester (2013), Asilomar (2014), Cape Town (2016), Yerevan (2017), Mexico City (2018), and Varese (2019), and look forward to renewing friendships with other INHIGEO members when the current pandemic subsides. In the meantime, I am fortunate to have been elected as Editor of the *Annual Record* for INHIGEO, a role for which I have an inspiring predecessor, Bill Brice.

It is by this series of events that I have had the gratifying opportunities to serve the History and Philosophy of Geology Division of GSA, my first home, and to extend that service to the History of Earth Sciences Society, and more recently to INHIGEO. It has been a rewarding journey in many, many ways. And again, I am delighted to receive the Friedman Award from the History and Philosophy of Geology Division of GSA.