

**1998 VRA Annual Conference  
Distinguished Service Award:  
Brenda MacEachern**

This evening the Visual Resources Association is pleased to honor Brenda MacEachern for her many years of service as editor of *POSITIVE* and for her dedication to the visual resources profession. Brenda received an honors bachelor degree in fine art from the University of Toronto in 1970. While an undergraduate she spent a year at the Université de Dijon. Brenda's approach to slide library management developed from the French model of accessibility. Upon graduation in 1970, Brenda began her career as a slide curator in the Visual Arts Department at the University of Western Ontario. She continues to serve in this capacity to the present day. In 1989 Brenda completed her requirements for a Master of Library and Information Science at the University. While she has held the same position for twenty-eight years, her long tenure has not been at all static. Brenda has carried out a number of initiatives and projects that have been a boon to her institution.

In the early 1980s, Brenda was the creator and director of a \$37,000 Academic Development Fund (ADF) project to systematically weed and replace 20,000 defective slides from her slide collection. This was the first project of its kind in North America. In 1989 she was the creator and director of another ADF grant, this one for \$78,000, to develop an automated slide cataloging system using DataEase. Over 100,000 slide records have been entered into the database.

A major highlight of her career, as far as being a visual resources curator, was realized when she designed the layout of the new Richard and Beryl Ivey Visual Resources Library in the John Labatt Visual Centre, which opened in 1994. This facility was recently nominated by Ed Sernie to Maryly Snow's list of "Best Slide Libraries."

Brenda has also been active in the Professional and Managerial Association of the University of Western Ontario, serving as Secretary/Treasurer in 1995-96, Vice President in 1996-97, and as the current President.

However, it is for her work as editor of *POSITIVE* that Brenda MacEachern is best known. Brenda came up with the idea for *POSITIVE* while attending the MACAA conference in Lincoln, Nebraska in 1976. *POSITIVE* had an immediate impact upon curators working in Canada, most of whom are quite physically isolated from each other. The introductory issue of *POSITIVE* set the tone for over twenty years of sharing professional information in an open and truly collegial way. To this day, *POSITIVE* continues to serve as an important communication tool for Canadian visual resources curators, providing them with updates on professional activities, vendor news, and features on comparative cataloging, copyright, and other issues. At the time of its inception, *POSITIVE* had about twenty subscribers. Today, subscriptions number nearly one hundred

and, in addition to Canada and the United States, are sent to England, Switzerland, and Australia.

Besides her service as editor of *POSITIVE*, Brenda has been very active in professional activities both within and beyond the parameters of her home institution. Over the years Brenda has been actively involved in the effect of Canadian Copyright Law on Visual Resources Collections. As early as 1977 Brenda chaired a session on copyright at the UAAC conference in Montreal. Brenda has participated in formulating briefs to the Canadian Government on this issue and she conducted a copyright survey, the results of which appeared in *POSITIVE*.

Brenda has also served on the Advisory Board for the 5th (1985) and 6th (1990) editions of the *Slide Buyers Guide*, published by the VRA. In 1992, she served on the Art and Architecture Thesaurus Visual Resources Advisory Group. Brenda has also presented papers on space planning, subject analysis, and other issues at various Canadian conferences. Brenda also organized and hosted the 1994 Canadian Visual Resources Curators Conference in London, Ontario.

Brenda has published articles in *POSITIVE* as well as in *Computers and the History of Art*. Her article, entitled "Using Quantitative Measures to Evaluate a Slide Library's Holdings," which appeared in *POSITIVE* in 1987, was for many years included as reading material for graduate students in Nancy Schuller's library science course at the University of Texas at Austin. Brenda still receives individual requests for her article "Automation of the Visual Arts Department Slide Library at the University of Western Ontario," which was published in *Computers and the History of Art* in 1994. Brenda also produced the *Guide to Sources for Canadian Visual Resources Collections* for the Canadian Visual Resources Curators Conference in Toronto in 1991.

Brenda has been a pioneer in extending the knowledge of her field to other disciplines. In 1990 Brenda broadcast a paper through closed-circuit telemedicine radio to medical librarians in Ontario and Quebec. The title of her broadcast was "Managing the Visual Arts Slide Library: A Model for Other Disciplines."

Brenda's enthusiasm for her work and her commitment to her community, institution, and profession have been a source of inspiration to many Canadians, but also to us outside of Canada. On behalf of the VRA, I feel honored to present Brenda MacEachern, our first Canadian recipient, with the 1998 VRA Distinguished Service Award.

Joseph Romano  
Chair, VRA Distinguished Service Award Committee  
Oberlin College

**1998 VRA Annual Conference  
Distinguished Service Award:  
Recipient Remarks**

When Joseph Romano phoned me in November with the news that I was this year's recipient of the VRA Distinguished Service Award, I was both surprised and extremely touched to be honored by an association that has been a guiding light throughout my career. Long before the Internet, it was through correspondence and conferences that I first made contact with mentors like Nancy DeLaurier and Luraine Tansey. Through them and other members of the Mid America College Art Association (MACAA), the VRA, and ARLIS/NA, I learned about cataloging systems, slide vendors, copyright, the ominous pink slide syndrome, and automation. Today, with limited travel funds and less time available to attend conferences, the VRA-L and the *VRA Bulletin* continue to provide a lifeline for me and many Canadian curators. Every day, from my office in southwestern Ontario, I tune in to the VRA-L to hear the latest news from VRA colleagues around the world. I thrive on the hot debates, follow up on references and news sources, and howl at the outrageous insider jokes. The generosity and dedication of the VRA must surely be the envy of other professions.

In accepting this honor tonight I do so as the first Canadian recipient and on behalf of my Canadian colleagues who have faithfully supported *POSITIVE* for more than twenty years. Nancy Kirkpatrick and Gillian Scott were the first contributors to the newsletter. These women have moved on to other

careers but left an important legacy of professionalism and collegiality. Since then, numerous other Canadians have supported *POSITIVE*. These include people who are well known to the VRA as well as many others who are less visible outside Canada. Together we have evolved into the nucleus of a loose group known as the Canadian Visual Resources Curators (CVRC). I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the many VRA members who have contributed to *POSITIVE* and supported the endeavors of the CVRC.

As Joseph mentioned, *POSITIVE* was born at a MACAA Conference in 1976 in Lincoln, Nebraska. As I debated about what to call the newsletter, I hit upon *POSITIVE* for a number of reasons. First of all, *POSITIVE* refers to a photographic image which, by extension, includes slides. Next, *POSITIVE* has the same meaning in both French and English, which satisfied my Canadian penchant for being bilingual. But the most significant reason was because *POSITIVE* has a wonderful connotation of optimism. In many ways, we Canadians have learned to be optimistic about our unique career choices thanks to the guidance, generosity, and support of the VRA.

I turn fifty this year and have been giving considerable thought as how best to celebrate this milestone in my life. As this year's recipient of the VRA Distinguished Service Award, I will be hard pressed to come up with a more treasured memory than to be honored by my dear friends and colleagues tonight.

Thank you so much.

Brenda MacEachern  
University of Western Ontario



President Jenni Rodda, Distinguished Service Award Recipient Brenda MacEachern, and Joseph Romano, Chair of the Distinguished Service Award Committee.



Brenda MacEachern receives her Distinguished Service Award and gift at the Annual Members Reception, 1998 Annual Conference.