2012 Nancy DeLaurier Award

Presented April 19, 2012 to
Sheila Hannah, Retired, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque

Presentation remarks from Cindy Abel Morris and Mark Pompelia

Good afternoon. I'm so pleased to be speaking to you in Albuquerque, New Mexico, the "Land of Enchantment"—a slogan that is, well, a slogan, but nevertheless has the virtue of being perfectly true. We are gathered in a truly singular place for our thirtieth anniversary. The question remains at this anniversary awards luncheon at a time when record achievement is met with great upheaval and where the journey is equal to the destination: how did we get here?

Co-nominator Cindy Abel Morris and I have an answer (and this is where our pleasure derives in being here this afternoon): Sheila Hannah is how we got here. I know that I am addressing an audience of doers, and mostly humble, quiet doers at that, but these remarks will show that Sheila is a pioneer of the initiatives that have come to define the Visual Resources Association. Like many pioneers, we often don't know their names or the details of what they have done but their accomplishments are indisputably foundational, cumulative, and ultimately indispensible in getting us to this destination.

At the start of the millennium at Rice University in Houston, a neighbor of sorts to New Mexico, I investigated the possibility of building an in-house database for visual resources. Sheila Hannah's name turned up in the research since she had built one of the first databases for visual resources: VISIC, the Visual Information Checklist, and subsequently published on the topic of database automation. When I later explored the possibility of an internship program in visual resources, colleagues said, "talk to Sheila," who had already presented and published on one of the most extensive and successful visual resources internship programs at the time. When I was confronted with the challenge of addressing the arts of Native America and the Southwest within the collection at Rice, again I heard: "talk to Sheila." Sheila, it turns out, had created VIRCONA, the Visual Resources Catalog of Native American Artists, one of the first authorities to be contributed to the Getty Vocabularies program that is shared to the entire world today. Database creation; training of new professionals; and shared authorities: you should now have a clear understanding of why Sheila Hannah is a pioneer in visual resources—a pioneer in getting us to where we are today.

With her achievements cumulative in effect, it is this last accomplishment that stands out in Sheila being successfully nominated for a Nancy DeLaurier Award here in Albuquerque. Databases will be locally adapted, internship programs will change, but the VIRCONA authorities represent an achievement of wide and lasting value and a precedent of shared contribution that harkens to our best nature as humble doers and inspires us still. She was one of the first critical and crucial voices to urge awareness and sensitivity to non-Western works of cultural heritage that directly informed the creation and early versions of the VRA Core. If that strikes us as a given in 2012, when our strengths lie in recognizing diversity of cultural objects, we have Sheila to thank for the intellectual and structural normalization of that attitude.

Sheila had her origin in libraries, which gave her a foundational and unwavering appreciation of standards. She soon moved to visual resources and continued that normalization in data standards and took up the mantle of visual resources training. Minimizing local idiosyncrasy, she could see the bigger picture of her work and contribute to a wider audience beyond her immediate setting. Or maybe, being here in remote New Mexico, she understood that she had to be her own doer. Sheila will credit others, which is understandable, but that should not take away from her cumulative string of accomplishments.

The Nancy DeLaurier Award hinges on the factor of a wide and shared impact. I won't quote the letters of recommendation beyond what you've seen projected on the screen, except to say that universal to all were the sentiments: "I'm so glad to see Sheila being recognized", "She was a critical contributor to our major initiatives, especially the shared authority", "It's likely we would not be where we are today without her."

So Sheila: I'm so glad to see you being recognized as a critical contributor to a shared initiative. And it's very clear that we would not be here today in Albuquerque without you. Congratulations.

Sheila Hannah's Remarks:

Mark, thank you very much for your kind words. I'm both humbled and thrilled to receive a 2012 Visual Resources Association Nancy DeLaurier Award. It is a great honor to be ranked with the outstanding people who have received this award before me. The fact that I was nominated for this recognition by Mark Pompelia and by Cindy Able Morris - two people who themselves do so much for the visual resources profession - is an added honor. Cindy and Mark, I thank you both. I also thank all those who submitted letters endorsing the nomination and I thank the committee for selecting me as a recipient.

As many of you know, I 'm now retired from the field of visual resources, so this bolt from the blue in the form of Margaret Webster saying I would receive a VRA award really jolted me into thinking about the past. I honestly couldn't recall any single achievement worthy of the distinction. I was told my recognition was a bit different. It was for my general work in visual resources to support Native American topics - not for one project with immediate impact like those recognized in previous years, but rather for a collection of efforts linked by a single theme that together produced a slower cumulative effect.

For me the slow accumulation began in 1980 when I co-edited with Zelda Richardson a now largely forgotten College Art Association Visual Resources Guide titled *Introduction to Visual Resource Library Automation* in which I naively suggested that not only main frame computers (which were the sole topic of the guide - does anyone even remember main frames), but also those new "Personal Computers" might have a role in our futures. There followed an article here, a book review there; a smattering of papers and panel discussions; the posting of a Native American classification system on-line, the commission of a slide label producing program that stored data in files that would later be ported to a custom relational database, submissions to the Getty Vocabularies, five years on the Data Standards Committee, participation in the VISION project, successful (and unsuccessful) grant applications, an on-line database, a permanently funded graduate internship program -- all always dedicated to insuring that any and all electronic visual resources activities could easily and accurately accommodate images of Native American art objects.

I am deeply grateful I took this multi-faceted approach, because at every stage it rewarded me with the opportunity to work with many smart and inspiring colleagues in the visual resources profession. I thank every one of them for productive collaborations and lively exchanges of ideas. While I can't name them all here, I feel I must mention two - Jeanette Mills and Karen Kessel - who have always been there when images of Native American art were on topic.

At my own institution I collaborated with dedicated staff members, many fine graduate students, IT heroes, database developers, generous deans and even legal counsels. I thank them all for giving me their support, hard work and valuable expertise.

And on the home front, I thank my husband, Michael Hannah, who has always, always been there for me with his moral support, practical advice and true wisdom.

While reflecting on my own history, I couldn't help but examine the accomplishments of our visual resources profession as a whole and I was struck by how much our discipline has to be proud of. Over the past thirty-five years, visual resources curators have evolved from cohort-starved image-wranglers isolated in their slide rooms to members of a vibrant and vital interactive community. As a community, our profession has moved from analog to digital, from slide cabinets to servers, from slide labels with limited information in teeny-tiny type to metadata rich electronic records. We've moved from light tables to terminals, from classification systems to search engines, from individual production to shared records, and from "I do it this way" to accepted standards in data, cataloging and vocabulary. We've gone from handing out carousel trays to managing Web services systems. And through our guides, bulletin, journal, listserv, workshops, summer institute, committees, website, conferences, amazing spirit of sharing and experimentation and yes -- even awards, we did it together - one measured individual effort linked to all the others over time.

In conclusion, I came to realize that this Nancy DeLaurier Award is actually an acknowledgement of the accumulation of contributions each of you has made in the past and will make in the future to the collective success of the visual resources profession. This Nancy DeLaurier award is a reflection of what each of you do every day - share an idea, mentor a student, write an article, participate in a committee, apply for a grant, catalog an image, share a lunch. So it is on behalf of all of you, that I accept this award. It's been fun working with visual resources, rewarding to belong to the VRA, and exciting to meet so many professional people.   Thank you.

[Link to full Convocation ceremony on Slideshare](#)