

1993 Distinguished Service Award

Distinguished Service Award Luraine Collins Tansey

From Luraine's unpublished, "The Artistic (and Sometimes Irreverent) Vitae of Luraine Collins Tansey":

"Born. Manhattan, KS, moved to Reno after being marooned on train in middle of Salt Lake with tracks washed out aft & before for twelve hours..."

To those of us who know and love Mrs. Richard Tansey (as Luraine most likes to be called) this quote is typical: an unexpected (and always interesting) comment and inevitably fun (and funny). In addition, the vitae is filled with references to her lifelong love of art and the world that surrounds it.

"Age 9. Earned first camera by selling perfume, Hawkeye Box by Kodak.

Ages 16-21. Student, BA, Art History, UC Berkeley and MA, Mills College , Photography.

Ages 24-26, Arts & Crafts worker in army hospitals during WWII."

In the above document, one of her entries noted that her starting salary as a librarian was \$1.95. This was unacceptable to Luraine Tansey-- for herself and for her colleagues. From then on she lobbied to change that and other inequitable working situations for art librarians and slide curators alike. Luraine accomplished this daunting task by exemplifying the unique professional aspects of our profession and, incidentally, exposing the inequities of librarians in the art field as she presented lectures and workshops around the world.

Luraine Tansey was one of the organizers of librarians' groups in California in the early '60s, helping plan meetings to be held at venues such as California's College Art Association (CAA) meetings, working towards her dream for a national group. She regularly attended CAA national conferences where she actively pursued the support of attending faculty for a CAA-recognized, but separate, organization for art librarians and curators. In Luraine's writings she mentions how encouraged she was when Wolfgang Freitag concurred that envisioning an international organization, as well as local and national, was an important goal. Today we know those efforts as the Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA) and Visual Resources Association (VRA), both with international membership.

Tansey is best known for the 1969 publication, A universal slide classification system with automatic indexing, co-authored with Wendell Simons. (Its 1970 re-publication title is A slide classification system for the organization and automatic indexing of interdisciplinary collections of slides and pictures.) She had been inspired to make the creation of a universal system of slide classification her thesis topic from observing problems as she

worked at various library and slide collections through the years. On one occasion, for instance, she had attempted to assist a frustrated speaker find a necessary slide for his soon-to-be-presented lecture! He had assumed he knew just where to find his slide since he was familiar with the system at his campus, but could not. Luraine, who was also a visitor to this particular slide collection, had not actually used the system but was familiar with it. By using her library skills, she soon realized that the system utilized different cataloging strategies for teaching vs. museum situations. Then and there, she dreamed of devising a universal system familiar to one and all. She says her book has always been in the public domain, meaning anyone can use any parts of it, and on meeting Tansey the first words you will most likely hear are, "...and how can I help you?"

Working at the slide library at the University of California/Santa Cruz at the time, she had discovered she had other objectives as well—a classification system that could be easily produced on a slide label and understood by slide filers. Following is an excerpt from an interview recorded in 1992 with Mrs. Tansey at her St. Helena, CA, country home and studio:

At the time I started in slide librarianship...I found it necessary to do repetitive typing and, being a very lazy person, wanted to avoid doing repetitive typing. Computers were available—mainframes to start with—and so I thought if I took in a slide and automated it right off and just pushed a button to get duplicates, to get the slide labels, the lists, the orders, the statistics, the cross-referencing, that would be quite a boon to the graduate students and then they could get along with their studies and learning their slides.

With publication of her book, the system was put in place for cataloging and slide label production for the mainframe computer then at use at UCSC where she was librarian for several years in the late '60s-early '70s. It is still used at UC Santa Cruz, though modified for more advanced technology, and at institutions around the world. The system immediately gained praise in the library and art history worlds. Because of its popularity and acceptance at educational institutions, museums, and even in industry (IBM asked her to design a system especially for them), Luraine was invited to speak and give seminars at locations around the globe such as the International Congress of Art History in Budapest (1968) and Granada (1971); Special Libraries section on Music Iconography at Copenhagen (1971) on music in art history; and at the Ibero-American University in Mexico City (1972) Tansey gave a two day seminar on computerized slide collections. Lectures were also given in Manitoba, Victoria, and Vancouver, Canada; AIA Chicago and San Francisco; and SLA in Kansas and Detroit during the years 1969-1975. Of the Budapest lecture Tansey related in a 1992 interview that:

I went to Budapest where some of my fellow librarians had translated a summary of my speech on slide classification, automated on computer into four languages so the audience had summaries of my speech as I showed the slides. It was well written up and received over quite a large European area.

Luraine Tansey used all these opportunities to promote her agenda for librarians and slide curators. Even after her "official retirement" from teaching art history at San Jose City

College in 1984, she supported her goals through membership and active participation in Canadian Art Historians, ALA SIA, CAA, ARLIS and VRA. She continued to assist her husband, Dr. Richard Tansey, and his colleague in their five revisions of Gardner's Art Through the Ages as she had done since 1969, providing the best illustrations she could find and preparing indices to the books for easier access to the materials and images—always remembering the needs of art and slide librarians.

Tansey's success in achieving status and security for our professions was recognized by both ARLIS/NA and the Visual Resources Association in the same year. In 1993 she was awarded the highest honor of these professional organizations, the Distinguished Service Award. VRA further recognized her pioneering efforts by instituting the Luraine Tansey Travel Award Dinner as one of their highlight events at the annual conference (as of 2004 it will be renamed the Luraine Tansey Education Award Dinner). Luraine is as proud of the recipients of the awards as the winners themselves, and likes to keep abreast of their careers.

What most endears Luraine to art librarians and visual resources curators is the recognition of what she achieved to win status and security for our professions. In particular, Luraine Tansey epitomized the potential of the field of visual resources, from automation and databases to a future in which everyone recognizes the import of visual images as a prime research and teaching tool requiring the highest professional curatorial skills. She helped to change what was an unappreciated group to a recognized field with the standards and integrity of art librarians.

Since 2000 Tansey has not been able to attend annual conferences as she had since ARLIS and VRA came into existence and she is sorely missed. Luraine Tansey's humor and complaints in forms of hilarious parodies of existing conditions helped to further the need to "get the girls out of the basements" (early slide libraries were often housed in basements or closets!) and into decent physical working conditions with staffs, state-of-the-art equipment, equitable salaries, and the recognition their chosen profession deserves.

Tansey Resume

1923 Bought first camera. A Brownie Hawkeye, by selling perfume. Drawings published in San Francisco Chronicle (comics page).

1933 Bought second camera. Worked in photography studio: sales, darkroom processing and painting eyelashes on wedding photos.

1935-38 Undergraduate student. University of California, Berkeley. BA. General Secondary Education (Art, Music, Drama). Prize for painting in exhibition.

1938-41 Mills College. Graduate student. MA. Fine Arts. Selected to Art Honor Society.

1941-43 Art teacher in California high school (ceramics, metalwork, mechanical drawing, flower arranging, photography, etc.)

WWII. Army Hospital worker (Arts & Crafts).

1945-48 New York Institute of Fine Arts. Graduate (PhD) student. Art History.

1945-46 Part-time work in NYU/IFA slide collection. Attended first CAA Conference.

1946-47 Vassar College. Art librarian.

1947-48 Brooklyn Museum of Art. American Art and Painting Department. Assistant curator.

1947-63 Married Dr. Richard Tansey. Had four sons. Taught art at Foothills College. Lectured on art history to women's clubs.

1963-64 University of Southern California: Doheny Library, Library assistant; Fisher Gallery. Assistant curator; teaching assistant (Architecture).

1964 CAA/Los Angeles. Attendee. Introduction to the Fogg System of slide cataloging used in slide collection at UCLA.

1964-84 San Jose City College. Professor (part time; tenured 1973).

1964-73 Evergreen Valley College and Mills College. Professor. Part time. Art History.

1965 CAA/St. Louis. Attendee. Asked CAA president to schedule a meeting exclusively for slide curators at next annual conference. He agreed.

1965-68 San Jose State University. Graduate student (MA). Library Science.

1965-72 University of California/Santa Cruz. Librarian in slide room. Part time.

1967 At Harvard for husband's class reunion observed a speaker confusedly searching for slides at museum slide room (Fogg System) though he used the system at his home school (UCLA). The two—university and museum—were cataloged differently. Tansey sees need to create a universal system.

1967 Conversation with Wolfgang Freitag encouraging not only local and national but also international organizations of art librarians and slide curators.

1967 UC/Berkeley. Meeting of State of California art librarians and slide curators. Tansey invites Patricia Farah of the Metropolitan Museum of Art to speak.

1968 Receives second Master's degree in Library Science. Her thesis on computerizing slide collections published the following year.

1969 First publication of A universal slide classification system with automatic indexing, co-authored with Wendell Simons.

1969 CAA/Boston. Meeting of art librarians and slide curators (Betty Jo Irvine presiding). Gives paper on Computerized Slide Collections.

1969 Speaker at International Congress of Art History on computerizing Gothic architecture slides. Budapest, Hungary.

1970 Second publication of her book, under sponsorship from Council on Library Resources, as A slide classification system for the organization and automatic indexing of interdisciplinary collections of slides and pictures.

1970 CAA/Buffalo. Meeting of art librarians and slide curators. (Florence Da Luiso presiding). Gives paper on Computerized Slide Collections.

1971 ASIS, Washington, DC. Talk and demonstration on computerized slide classification and filing.

1971 International Congress of Art History. Granada, Spain. Chair of slide and art librarians section.

1971 Ibero-American University, Mexico City. Gives two-day seminar on computerized slide classification.

1972 Special Libraries Association Conference. Toronto. Reads paper on Social Sciences classification.

1973 Special Libraries Association Conference. Copenhagen, Denmark. Music iconography section. Reads paper on Music in Art History.

1967-92 Assists husband and co-author with images and indices of their five revisions of Gardner's Art Through the Ages.

1992-93 Received both ARLIS/NA's and VRA's Distinguished Service Awards (www.arlisna.org/dsa_winners.html) (<http://www.vraweb.org/awards.html>)

Professional memberships: American Library Association (ALA), Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA), College Art Association (CAA), Society of Architectural Historians (SAH), Special Libraries Association (SLA), Visual Resources Association (VRA).