



AAHM

American
Association for the
History of
Medicine

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2024

MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT MARY FISSELL



Happy summer! I hope everyone is finding ways to keep cool. For some of us, it's archive time, others are polishing syllabi or footnotes, or seeing patients; hope everyone gets some relaxing down time.

I'm in the midst of sorting out the next round of committees, and I am heartened. Our society members want to contribute! Many committees could be staffed several times over with volunteers. Some heroes just indicated "put me where you need me." So please know that if you volunteered but don't end up on a committee, it's not personal, and please keep filling out that form indicating interest.

Especially notable for me is the collective care that we have for early-career scholars. The Shryock Prize Committee (award for best graduate student essay) could be filled six times over; the Osler (equivalent for medical students) ditto. I often hear worries about clinicians' waning participation in our society, but many committees see clinicians totaling a third or a quarter of volunteers. All of this willingness to help suggests that we are stronger than we sometimes imagine, good news.

Where I've been putting effort this past year, as many of you already know, is in keeping us moving forward in an era where jobs are scarce and meetings increasingly unaffordable for many. Many thanks to all of you for talking with the Task Force on Meetings, filling out the survey, offering your thoughts. Special thanks to the members of the Task Force: Keith Wailoo, Pablo Gomez, Mary Brazelton, and Andrew Ruis. We'll be submitting our report to Council in the autumn and members will hear all about our findings and recommendations.

For me, summer is all about swimming outdoors — ok, sometimes the best part in Baltimore's weather is actually sitting in a damp swimsuit afterwards, enjoying the evaporation! So I leave you with an early-modern image that makes me laugh every single time I see it. It's from *De arte natandi*, a 1587 book on how to swim; for me there's just something deeply comical about the idea of learning to swim... from a book.

GUEST LECTURE REQUEST

Tulane University School of Medicine's History of Medicine Society is seeking speakers for their History of Medicine elective this winter. They especially seek one hour lectures on histories of medicine from Africa, Australia, Asia, and indigenous communities. Interested? Email coordinator Cameron Myers at cmyers10@tulane.edu.

The History of Medicine & Archival Restriction

AAHM member Alexandra Lord writes on the difficulties of researching around restrictions archives placed on some medical records.



The envelope arrived after weeks of waiting. Even before opening it, I knew what I would find.

In accord with state law, New York’s Office of Mental Health would—and did—deny me access to records from its nineteenth-century asylums. It did not matter that I was the descendant of a nineteenth-century patient or that I was a professional historian seeking records for a scholarly book.

New York’s refusal was rooted in the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA). HIPAA created national standards protecting health information from being disclosed without a patient's consent. But it also inadvertently denied historians and descendants “access to ancient or old records of historical value.” In 2013, the Department of Health and Human Services recognized the problem and amended HIPAA. 45 CFR 164.502(f) allowed patient records to be accessed fifty years after the patient’s death. But several states, New York among them, responded to this amendment by passing laws which sharply limited or even prevented researchers and descendants from accessing these records.

Fortunately, state legislators have now agreed that the state should provide access. A bill allowing descendants to access these records is pending in the state legislature, with the AAHM having provided a letter of support. New York’s willingness to reassess its laws indicates that the tide may be turning.

More states may be amenable to changing their laws; you may want to explore access in your own state. But persuading states to reassess their laws will require historians to educate legislators on both the value of these records and the relatively recent emergence of the concept of patient privacy. Historians of medicine are well-suited to the task.

If you would like to support the campaign in New York State by submitting a letter, please email Lexi Lord at lexilordsemail@gmail.com. If you are interested in pursuing the issue in your state, and seek support from the AAHM, please contact both Lexi and our secretary Sarah Handley-Cousins at aahm@histmed.org.

Alexandra Lord is the author of *Condom Nation: The US Government’s Sex Education Campaign from World War I to the Internet* and the forthcoming *Bridge: Suicide and its Afterlife in an American Family, 1890-2020*.

THE TUSKEGEE STUDY: FACT & FICTION



In June, Susan Reverby did a program with actress Alfre Woodard, star of "Miss Evers' Boys," the fictionalized HBO movie about the Syphilis Study in Tuskegee. The two discussed fact and fiction in the study, and her experience playing the nurse who served as the go between the Public Health Service and the unwitting participants. The program includes a 4 minute animation history of the Study and a clip from her film. If you would like a video of this event to use, email Susan at sreverby@wellesley.edu and she will add you to the Dropbox link.



Boston, MA
May 1-4, 2025

Save the date for our 2025 annual meeting in Boston, where we'll celebrate our 100th birthday as an organization!

Coming Soon: 2025 Call for Papers

GOT
news?

Do you have announcements about exciting projects, events, or publications you'd like to share with the AAHM membership? Submit your news [using this Google form](#) and we'll put it in the next newsletter! (You'll also be able to find this form on our website.)

As always, submit your CFPs, job ads, and other time-sensitive announcements to aahm@histmed.org and the secretary will add to the website.

2024 COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Program Committee: Rebecca Kluchin and Johanna Schoen

Local Arrangements Committee: Emily R. Novak Gustainis and David Shumway Jones

Osler: Robin Rohrer

Shryock: Lisa Pruitt

Welch: Rick Keller

Pressman-Burroughs: Debbie Doroshow

Estes Chair: Christoph Gradmann

Garrison Lecture: Beatrix Hoffman

Rosen: Todd Olszewski

Annual Meetings: Jennifer Gunn

Education and Outreach: Debjani Das

Development/Centennial Campaign: Margaret Marsh

Finance: Stephen Greenberg

Nominations: Andrew Hogan

Publications: Emily Bowlus-Peck



HELP PRESERVE AAHM'S HISTORY!

What was your first annual meeting like? What's your favorite AAHM memory?

Please consider recording an interview with another AAHM member to help us preserve our history as we approach our 100th birthday!

You can record your interview as a Zoom or in a voice memo. When you're done, send an email to Sarah at aahm@histmed.org to get it saved.



**CLICK HERE TO SUPPORT
THE CENTENNIAL
CAMPAIGN!**

*Save
THE
Date*

History of Medicine Week will take place from October 7-11! It will be a fun and informative week filled with activities to build camaraderie and disseminate knowledge about the field. You can look forward to sessions on teaching, sharing the history of medicine with broader audiences, conversations with authors, a Wikipedia Hackathon, happy hour, and more!