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# Looking Back, Looking Forward: 50 Years of the Visual Resources Association Bulletin

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# Looking Back, Looking Forward: 50 Years of the Visual Resources Association Bulletin

## **Abstract**

In 50 years of publication, the *Visual Resources Association Bulletin (VRAB)* has documented and preserved the history of the Association and the triumphs, struggles, and experiments of visual resources professionals worldwide. This article traces the history of the *VRAB* through transition points, charting editors, name changes, and topical columns that provide glimpses into the concerns and unique knowledge of the profession. As we look back at the milestones, and more importantly the people, that got us to the current iteration of the *VRAB*, we also look forward to the next phases of the journal.

## **Keywords**

Visual resources, history, research, professional development, academic journal, Visual Resources Association, 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, *Visual Resources Association Bulletin (VRAB)*.

## **Author Bio and Acknowledgements**

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Thanks to Maureen Burns for contributing the Appendix expanding upon her extensive and crucial involvement with the *VRAB*.

## Introduction

Why has the *Visual Resources Association Bulletin (VRAB)* had such longevity? It is not the first professional publication of its kind. The Picture division of the Special Libraries Association published the journal *Picturescope* starting in 1953, covering “picture collections in all disciplines.”<sup>1</sup> Other contemporary publications included the newsletter *Positive* by the Canadian Visual Resources Professional Group.<sup>2</sup>

Could the *VRAB*'s adaptability be the reason for its current existence? Through the years, the *VRAB* has undergone name changes, content coverage shifts, and access and format revolutions. Or perhaps it is the strength of the Visual Resources Association (VRA) that has kept the educational mission in focus and appointed editorial stewards who have allowed the *VRAB* to remain relevant to the profession throughout the years. As we look back over 50 years of the journal, I encourage everyone to look forward to the next iterations of the *VRAB* and bring along the values and characteristics of the past that still resonate in our present.

## Unifying the Profession (1974-1983)

From 1968-1974, visual resources curators began congregating at the College Art Association (CAA), Mid-America College Art Association (MACAA), Art Libraries Society of North America (ARLIS/NA), and Comité International d'Histoire de l'Art (CIHA), assisting with conference programming and distributing newsletters.<sup>3</sup> While the *CAA Slides and Photographs Newsletter* was distributed starting in 1972, the *VRA Bulletin* saw its official start with Volume 1, No. 1 of *Mid-America College Art Association Slides and Photographs Newsletter (MACAA Newsletter)* published in September 1974 and spearheaded by Nancy DeLaurier (Fig. 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Carla Conrad Freeman, “Visual Media in Education: An Informal History,” *Visual Resources* 6, no. 4 (1990): 338, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.1990.9658877>.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Miller Hoort, “General Introduction,” *Visual Resources* 6, no. 4 (1990): 318, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.1990.9658875>.

<sup>3</sup> Carla Conrad Freeman, “Visualizing Art: An Overview of the Visual Resources Profession in the United States,” *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America* 16, no. 2 (1997): 33, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27948897>.

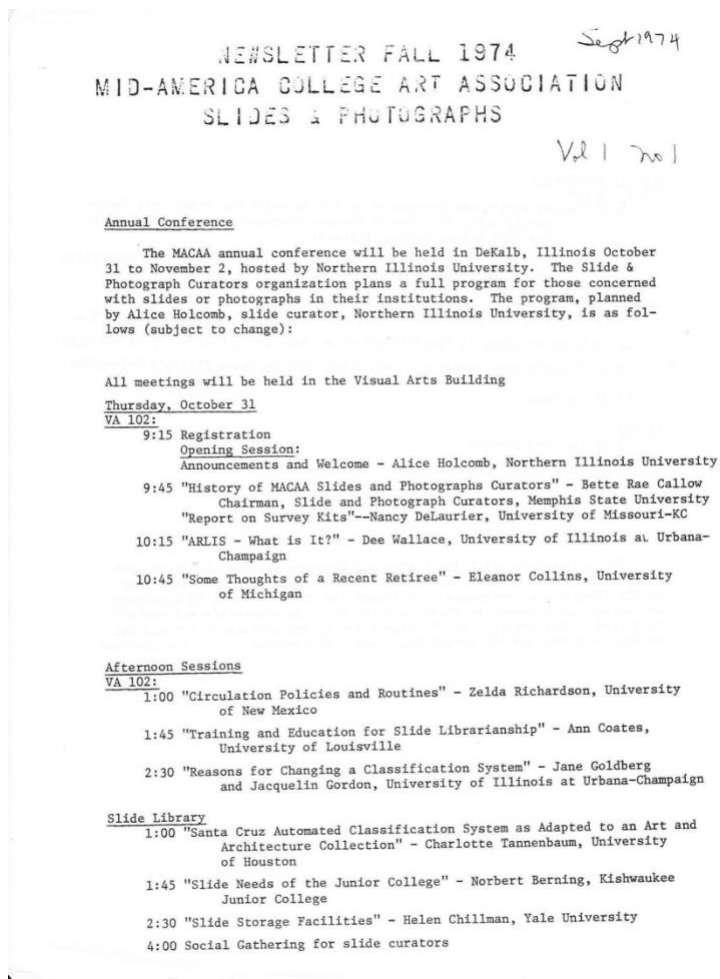


Figure 1: First page of *Mid-America College Art Association Slides and Photographs Newsletter 1, no. 1, 1974*.

costs to soar, and all recipients were required to pay a subscription fee starting in 1978.<sup>6</sup>

The Slide and Photograph Curators groups continued to meet regionally, nationally, and internationally through the 1970s, coalescing into more intricate professional networks. The newsletter was renamed the *International Bulletin for Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts (Bulletin)* in 1980, after a recommendation came from the Visual Resources group at the CIHA conference in 1979 in Bologna.<sup>7</sup> At this conference, CIHA formed committees with the leadership of the *MACAA Newsletter* and set up a process for making the newsletter truly international. The newsletter established a European coordinator position to send news to editor DeLaurier who would then publish the newsletters and mail a copy to a CIHA committee member in Oxford to be printed and distributed to subscribers in Europe. From the beginning, the title *International Bulletin for*

The *MACAA Newsletter* quickly became a prime source of information for the profession, with the circulation growth touted in 1976: “Our own MA-CAA organization of Slide and Photograph Curators has grown to serve VR people from ‘Hawaii to Ontario’ through our Newsletter, and our annual conferences continue to bring together more and more curators who formerly had to go it alone.”<sup>4</sup>

Furthering this aim of reaching like-minded professionals, the newsletter issued a call to action by encouraging readers to “seek out your fellow slide curators and visit their collections.”<sup>5</sup> This sentiment about uniting the many visual information workers working alone at their institutions has never left the Visual Resources Association’s organizational mission – as evidenced by the active Solo Special Interest Group. The *MACAA Newsletter*, subsidized by MACAA for its members, attracted so much interest that a subscription cost for non-MACAA members was initiated. Eventually demand caused publishing

<sup>4</sup> “Notes from the Chairperson, or Thoughts on the Occasion of the Bicentennial,” *Mid-America College Art Association Slides and Photographs Newsletter* 3, no. 2 (1976): 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Nancy DeLaurier, “Status of the Bulletin RE: A New VR Organization,” *International Bulletin for Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1982): 6, <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/issue/view/43>.

<sup>7</sup> Cynthia Clark, “Report of Visual Resources Meetings CIHA Bologna, September 10-14, 1979,” *Mid-America College Art Association Slides and Photographs Newsletter* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1979): 8, <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/issue/view/57>.

*Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts* was recognized as “both long and formal,” and a contest was launched to find a “short one-word catch-title.”<sup>8</sup> Suggestions included Oculus, Visus, Tabulae, Visi-Bull, Visible, Avanti,<sup>9</sup> and ART/INTERDOC (AID),<sup>10</sup> but ultimately it seems no consensus was reached and shorter references to the journal continued as the *Bulletin* or the *International Bulletin*.

This name change was occurring at the same time as the discussion about founding a separate professional visual resources organization that could unite the field. This discussion, which resulted in a ballot with four potential plans of action, took place largely in the *Bulletin*. Nancy DeLaurier wrote an editorial in favor of the option for a new, separate visual resources organization, asking, “Do we look on ourselves as a sub-group of librarians (as ARLIS and SLA have traditionally seen us)? Or are we our own profession, parallel, but not secondary, to librarians?”<sup>11</sup> Tied into this discussion was also a consideration of the future of the *Bulletin*. MACAA could no longer subsidize the publication due to the broadening focus behind the region, and the *Bulletin*’s MACAA/VR publishing group expressed a preference for relinquishing control of the publication to the new professional organization.<sup>12</sup> When published survey results (Fig. 2) showed a strong preference for a stand-alone organization, the *Bulletin* was firmly tied to the new visual resources organization.

The leaders behind the Visual Resources Association – Christine L. Sundt, DeLaurier, Nancy Shuller, and Zelda Richardson – chose Missouri as the state of incorporation due to the publication headquarters being in Kansas City and named the *Bulletin* the prime communication channel for the organization. The first issue of 1983 saw the addition of the subtitle “The Journal of the Visual Resources Association” on the cover. Additionally, the 1983 subscription to the *Bulletin* also included membership in the newly formed Visual Resources Association. The subscription price of 6 dollars (roughly equivalent to 19 dollars today) was an extraordinary value.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> “Contest,” *Mid-America College Art Association Slides and Photographs Newsletter* 6, no. 4 (Winter 1979): 10, <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/issue/view/57>.

<sup>9</sup> “A Short Name for the ‘International Bulletin for Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts,’” *International Bulletin for Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 7, <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/issue/view/50>.

<sup>10</sup> “Bulletin Name,” *International Bulletin for Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts* 7, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 3, <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/issue/view/51>.

<sup>11</sup> Nancy DeLaurier, “Editorial on the VR Organization,” *International Bulletin for Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1982): 11, <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/issue/view/42>.

<sup>12</sup> DeLaurier, “Status of the Bulletin,” 6-7.

<sup>13</sup> “The Visual Resources Association is Created,” *International Bulletin for Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts* 9, no. 3 (September 1982): 1, <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/issue/view/44>.

## VRA

### THE VISUAL RESOURCES ASSOCIATION IS CREATED

On the deadline date, July 15, for the "new organization" plebiscite, Nancy Kirkpatrick sent the results to the other two members of the committee, Christine Sundt and Norine Cashman, and to the *Bulletin*, as follows (excerpted):

"A total of 42 ballots were received. The results are as follows:

A. Maintain status quo	1
B. Existing group	11
ARLIS - 9	
SLA - 2	
C. Information network	1
D. New organization	29

In spite of the low number of returns, there is a clearcut majority." Christine Sundt, chairman of the CAA-VR group forthwith instructed Nancy DeLaurier to proceed with articles of the incorporation in the state of Missouri, as Kansas City is the headquarters for the *Bulletin*, which will be the new VRA's communication vehicle. Incorporation requires naming three officers and directors, so the following temporary officers/directors were named: Christine Sundt, chairman; Nancy Schuller, vice-chairman; and Nancy DeLaurier, secretary-treasurer. Nancy Schuller and Zelda Richardson are working on a constitution and by-laws.

All 1983 *Bulletin* subscriptions will automatically include membership in the Visual Resources Association. The subscription price will remain \$6.00. The fee will probably be raised in 1984 as the Association activities increase, but current plans are to keep the fee relatively low.

The VRA will be formally organized and officers elected at the CAA Conference in Philadelphia in February. Some preliminary discussion, particularly the changing role of the MACAA/VR group, will take place at the MACAA Conference in Iowa City in October.

Figure 2: "The Visual Resources Association is Created," *International Bulletin for Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts* 9, no. 3 (September 1982): 1.

adding a revenue stream to the publication.<sup>16</sup> The second half of the 1980s saw the growth of the Technical Information section – particularly the subsection Computer News – and the Cataloging section, and introduced Professional Status columns and facilitation of slide exchanges.

In 1986, VRA added sponsorship for the journal *Visual Resources: An International Journal of Documentation* (which was published from 1980-1983 under a different leadership structure) to their slate of publications.<sup>17</sup> VRA stalwart Sundt served as the Technology Editor starting in 1986 and then as Editor from 2008-2015. The VRA provided financial assistance to the publication for years before a new publication arrangement was made. During this era, publications accounted for a large percentage of the expenses for the VRA, with 75 percent of membership dues going towards the

Throughout 1978, the *Bulletin* was establishing its character with regular columns, including conference updates, reviews of relevant journal articles, professional news, conservation, microforms, and slide market news. The long-running column "Ask a Photographer" by Patrick Young of the University of Michigan first appeared in 1979 when he wrote, "My intention here, and in future columns, will be to present possible choices, different techniques or various alternatives that might be considered in the production of slides by an Art or Art History Department."<sup>14</sup> He would go on to cover topics such as copy photography techniques, color film selection, lantern slides, museum photography, equipment for slide publication, color balance, and color film comparisons. In 1983, Joy Alexander Blouin became the second editor and production moved to the University of Michigan. Under her leadership, new standards and features emerged and become permanent.

### Setting a Standard (1984-2010)

The first issue of 1984 saw a refreshed layout and cover featuring an image of Luca Cambiaso's *The Elect Ascending into Heaven* but maintained the basic double columned newsletter format. The editors had previously written that they wanted "to keep the *Bulletin* visually low-key, letting it ride on its content, rather than a costly slick format."<sup>15</sup> The primacy of content that is highly relevant and applicable to the visual resources professionals has held fast throughout all the iterations of the *VRAB*. 1984 also saw the inclusion of advertisements in the *Bulletin*,

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Young, "Ask the Photographer: Equipment for Copy Photography," *Mid-America College Art Association Slides and Photographs Newsletter* 6, no. 1 (March 1979): 10, <https://online.vrweb.org/index.php/vrab/issue/view/54>.

<sup>15</sup> "MACAA, VRA, *The Bulletin* & Guides," *International Bulletin for Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts* 9, no. 4 (December 1982): 5, <https://online.vrweb.org/index.php/vrab/issue/view/45>.

<sup>16</sup> Astrid R. Otey, "A History of the Visual Resources Association," *Visual Resources* 6, no. 4 (1990): 345, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.1990.9658878>.

<sup>17</sup> Christine L. Sundt, "Visual Resources and the Visual Resources Association," *Visual Resources* 3, no. 2 (1986): v-vi, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.1986.9659070>.

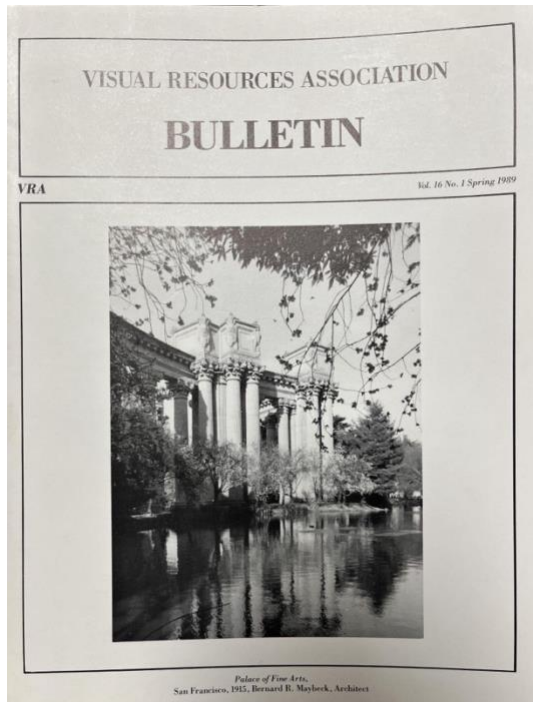


Figure 3: Cover of the first issue under the *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* title, *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1989).

publication of the *Bulletin* in 1988.<sup>18</sup> The late 1980s also saw the launch of the Special Bulletins, starting with “British Artists Authority List from the Yale Center for British Art Photograph Archive” by Anne Marie Logan. From the beginning, there were always special publications released by the publication groups and editors. In the early years, they were called MACAA kits, then later guides and included the “Slide Buyers Guide,” the “Guide for Management of Visual Resources Collections,” and the “Guide to Equipment for Slide Maintenance and Viewing.”<sup>19</sup> These new Special Bulletins covered topics related to cataloging, collections management, and directories of professionals using specific resources or technologies. The *VRAB* editor was the de facto publication officer charged with printing and distributing the Special Bulletins prior to 2005, when the VRA Board added a Publication and Communication Officer.<sup>20</sup>

In 1989, the journal took the official title *Visual Resources Association Bulletin*, and the sections of the *VRAB* solidified into VRA News, Technical Information, Cataloging, Collections, Reviews, and For Your Information (Fig. 3).<sup>21</sup> This expansion was to fit the needs of Visual Resources Curators who

must now understand the MARC format, the AAT, and ICONCLASS, acquaint ourselves with the activities of VRA, MCN, CHart, ARLIS, IFLA, MACAA, CAA, SECAC, CIDOC, as well as inform ourselves about authority control, conservative methods, copyright issues, new film and photographic techniques, new equipment, new vendors, new reference works, the new art history, and, most troublesome of all, automation.<sup>22</sup>

In the early 1990s, Joy Alexander Blouin and her editorial staff “consistently and seamlessly expanded the scope of the *Bulletin* from its origins as a trade newsletter to its complete expression as a professional journal.”<sup>23</sup> Notably, in volume 17, issue 4 from 1990, the term “Feature Articles” was introduced, connoting research-based articles. These feature articles largely presented VRA conference content to a larger audience and allowed professionals to reference the expertise of colleagues, showcasing case studies, workflows, practices, and innovative research in the field. 1996 was a year of transition for the *VRAB* as Joy Alexander Blouin, who grew the publication “from an

<sup>18</sup> Eleanor E. Fink, “Notes from the President,” *International Bulletin for Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts* 15, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 3.

<sup>19</sup> A. Zelda Richardson, “Visual Resources Guides: Past, Present and Future,” *International Bulletin for Photographic Documentation of the Visual Arts* 9, no. 4 (1982): 6, <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/issue/view/45>.

<sup>20</sup> John J. Taormina, “In Memoriam: Nancy Shelby Schuller,” *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 38, no. 3 (2011): 7, <https://online.vraweb.org/index.php/vrab/issue/view/24>.

<sup>21</sup> Otey, “A History,” 345.

<sup>22</sup> Rebecca Miller Hoort, “Why a Profession?” *Visual Resources* 6, no. 4 (1990): vi, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01973762.1990.9658873>.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Romano, “New *VRAB* Bulletin Editor,” *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 18.



Figure 4: Jon Cartledge, *Where's the Artstor?*, ink wash on paper, 8 1/4 x 8 3/4 inches, ca. 2004. Originally published in *Images: the Newsletter of the VRA* 1, no. 2 (April 1, 2004).

average issue length of twenty pages to last year's [1995] conference proceedings issue of ninety-six pages,"<sup>24</sup> stepped down as editor after 13 years.

John Taormina was named the new editor and oversaw transitions in the profession by instituting new columns such as Copyright Issues, Databases, and the VRA Listserv. On September 8, 1997, the *VRAB* launched an online version, which included only the feature articles from the print publication, with the intention to reach beyond the current membership.<sup>25</sup> Under Taormina's editorship, the *VRAB* became so ingrained as a professional journal focused on feature articles that the VRA

needed an outlet for member news, updates on copyright, and new resources. *Image Stuff* was launched in February 2004 but was quickly renamed *Images, the online newsletter of the Visual Resources Association*. Early issues even included a funnies column by Jon Cartledge that often showcased the concerns of visual resources professionals during the digital transition (Figs. 4-8).<sup>26</sup> The newsletter ended publication in 2013.



Figure 5: Jon Cartledge, *Summer Plans*, ink wash on paper, 6 1/8 x 10 inches, 2004. Originally published in *Images: the Newsletter of the VRA* 1, no. 3 (June 1, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> Joy Blouin, "Notes from the Retiring Editor," *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 18.

<sup>25</sup> John J. Taormina, "Notes from the Editor," *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 5.

<sup>26</sup> For more information on Jon Cartledge's art, please see: <https://jonathancartledge.com/>.



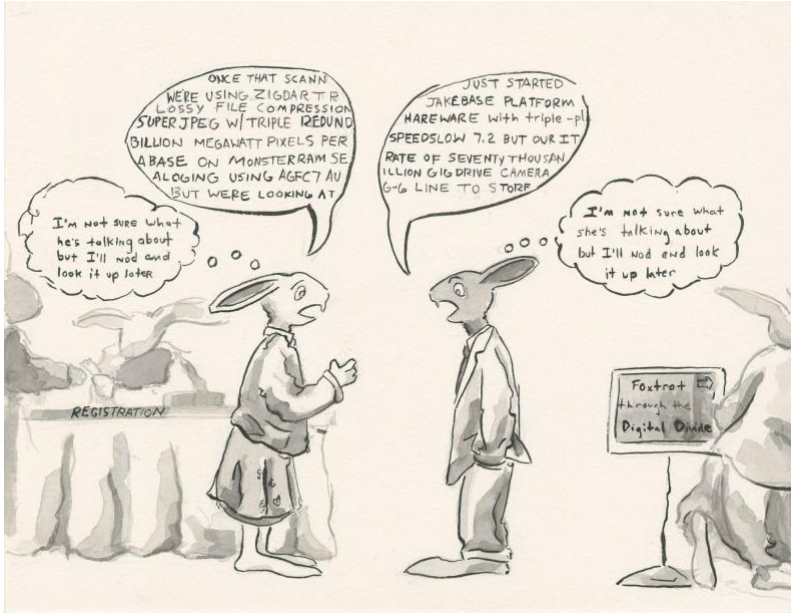


Figure 6: Jon Cartledge, *Not Sure, but I'll Nod and Look It Up Later*, ink wash on paper, 7 5/8 x 10 inches, ca. 2004. Originally published in *Images: the Newsletter of the VRA* 1, no. 5 (October 1, 2004).

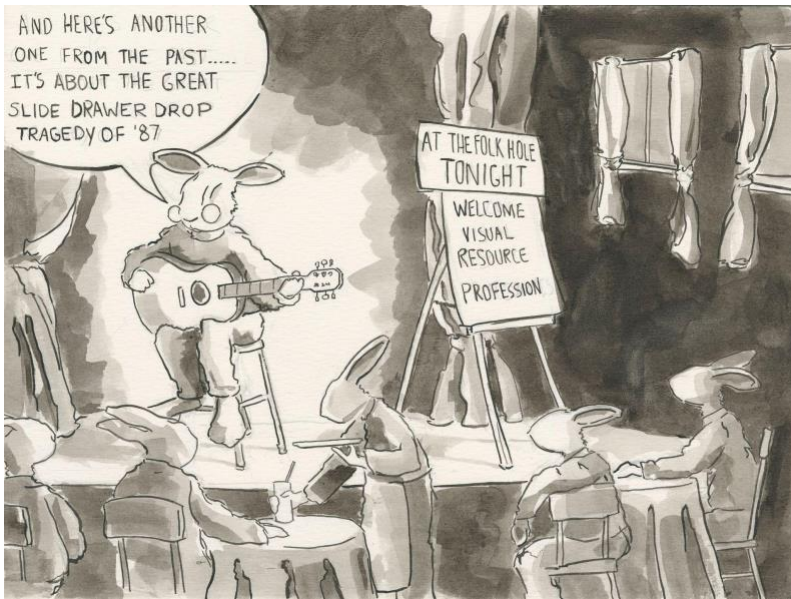


Figure 7: Jon Cartledge, *The Drawer Drop of '87*, ink wash on paper, 9 x 12 inches, ca. 2005. Originally published in *Images: the Newsletter of the VRA* 2, no. 3 (June 1, 2005).

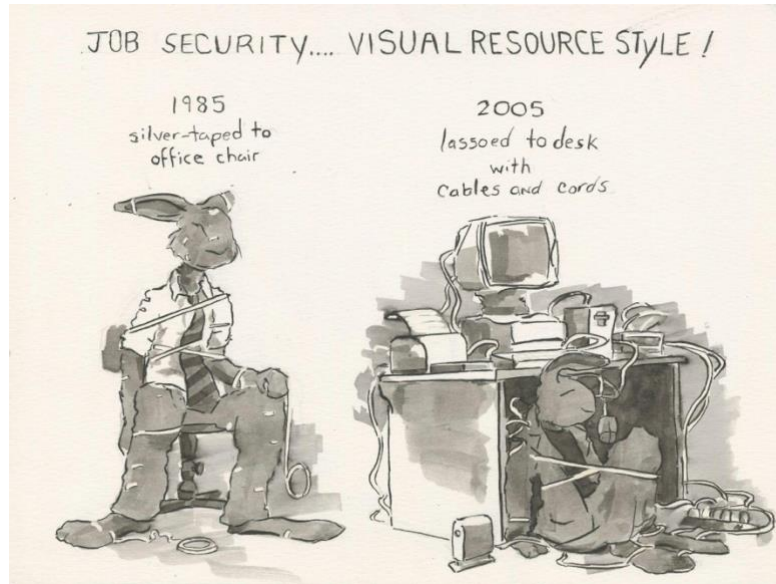


Figure 8: Jon Cartledge, *Visual Resources Job Security*, ink wash on paper, 9 x 12 inches, 2005. Originally published in *Images: the Newsletter of the VRA* 2, no. 6 (December, 2005).

Taormina ended his editorship of the *VRA*B in 2005, writing:

My one suggestion as outgoing *Bulletin* editor is that more members of the Association need to write articles for our print journal. Developing an evaluated body of literature pertinent to our profession disseminates and archives our collective knowledge for colleagues now and for the future.<sup>27</sup>

This sentiment deserves to be reiterated, and I hope past, present, and future members can reflect on the wealth of expertise the *Bulletin* gathers and preserves.

Mark Pompelia began his journey with the *VRA*B as Associate Editor in 1995 and in 2005 was named the next editor. He was instrumental in implementing a PDF version of the *VRA*B in 2007. This was in addition to the print version and represented an important step in increasing access. In 2007 and 2008, the *VRA*B focused on special issues highlighting new standards and technologies in the field, including “Creating Shareable Metadata: CCO and the Standards Landscape,” with guest editors Elisa Lanzi and Linda McRae, “The Digital Transition: Perspectives from Art Historians” with guest editor Jenni Rodda, and “Digital Collaborations” with guest editor John Taormina. By 2010, the VRA Board was concerned in part due to continuing economic conditions affecting members and set out “to create and sustain a comprehensive, flexible, and forward-thinking VRA publications program.”<sup>28</sup> A newly constituted Publishing Advisory Group was charged with overseeing the swath of different communication vehicles. Recommending new technologies and communication methods were at the forefront of their responsibilities as ways to increase efficiency and effectiveness while potentially lowering costs. As Allan Kohl remarked in 2010, “Do we embrace the *Bulletin* as an e-journal, and bid a reluctant farewell to the paper publication, if by so doing we can save nearly \$15,000 in printing and distribution costs?”<sup>29</sup> Pompelia finished his editorship in 2010 but remained on the Publishing Advisory Group to help chart the new path for publishing.

### Transforming Access (2011-2024)

The move to an electronic-only *VRA*B in 2011 was a major process, with the Publishing Advisory Group researching and selecting a new platform, but the switch was successful and eventually lowered the cost of publication even more than anticipated – from \$30,000 per year to

<sup>27</sup> John J. Taormina, “2005 Distinguished Service Award: Recipient Remarks,” *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 32, no. 1 (Summer 2005): 24.

<sup>28</sup> Maureen Burns, “Notes from the President,” *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 37, no. 3 (2010): 4.

<sup>29</sup> Allan T. Kohl, “State of the Association,” *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 37, no. 3 (2010): 9.

\$6,000.<sup>30</sup> The first electronic-only issue of the *VRA Bulletin* was vol. 38, no. 1, spearheaded by the new editor Anne Blecksmith. This editorial transition saw the differentiation of editorial roles with Blecksmith serving as Content Editor and Jason Miller serving as Production Editor. This issue also outlined the existing sections of the *VRA Bulletin* as Feature Articles, Perspectives, Reviews, and Association News, the formats still in effect today.

Blecksmith's last issue as editor was in 2013, and the Content Editor role passed to Maureen Burns, with Jason Miller remaining as Production Editor until Hannah Marshall took over the role in 2016. Special themed issues during this era included "Digital Humanities and the Visual" with guest editor John Taormina in 2016, "Scope Drift" in 2017, and "Cataloging Today: Enlarging the Sphere" with guest editor Susan Jane Williams in 2018. Another key milestone was reached in 2017 under the editorship of Burns and Marshall: opt-in peer review.<sup>31</sup> With this enhancement, the feature article designation now connotes that the article has undergone a double-blind peer-review process.

To this day, Burns is a key advocate for the *VRA Bulletin* and continues to author impactful articles. She writes:

This is what I value and has been my experience with publishing (not necessarily in priority order), it compels you to: think deeper about what you are doing and why, expose yourself to new ideas, develop knowledge, share ideas, document experiences, learn from others' experiences, preserve work in the permanent research record, involve yourself in our professional community, expand your professional network, increase the potential for interaction with your peers, open up opportunities for collaborative activities, maybe even inspire others, and, last but not least, do it for VRA, to accelerate the progression of the field of visual resources.<sup>32</sup>

In October 2017, the Executive Board started the process to move the *VRA Bulletin* to open access from its subscription model. Speaking to the importance of this initiative, VRA President Jen Green remarked, "[s]cholarly communication and open access are emerging areas within the work of visual resource members, and we hope that the *Bulletin's* move to open access will help the VRA become a leader in support of this work."<sup>33</sup> Maureen Burns stepped down as Content Editor at the end of 2018 and Hannah Marshall stepped into the role in 2019, with Amy Lazet as the new Production Editor, a role she still holds. Marshall and Lazet oversaw the first open access issue of the *VRA Bulletin* in 2019, and all issues are now licensed under a Creative Commons 4.0 International License.

Marshall handed over the role of Content Editor to Jasmine Burns in 2020, who focused on increasing the number of peer-reviewed feature articles published in each issue. Sara Schumacher stepped up as Content Editor in 2022, starting a new initiative of adding an interview with a professional in different affiliated fields for each issue. Schumacher and Lazet also successfully advocated to remove the publishing fee charged to non-VRA members, making it free for anyone to publish in the *VRA Bulletin*.

### Leveraging Our Expertise

Digging through the archives of the *VRA Bulletin* illuminates the history of the profession as well as the values, spirit, and energy of VRA members through the years. Education and community have

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<sup>30</sup> Maureen Burns, "State of the Association," *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 39, no. 2 (2013): 2-3.

<sup>31</sup> Jen W. Green, "2017 State of the Visual Resources Association," *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 44, no. 1 (2017): 3.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix 1: "Reflecting on the *VRA Bulletin*" by Maureen Burns.

<sup>33</sup> Jen W. Green, "2018 State of the Visual Resources Association," *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 45, no. 1 (2018): 5.

remained a priority in every era, and the *VRA*B fulfills a key role in recording the VRA's successes and capturing and promoting scholarship and collaboration from professionals within and beyond the organization. The VRA annual conference has always been a focus of activity, community building, and knowledge sharing through the years (Fig. 9). Currently not as many conference participants choose to publish their research in the *VRA*B as in earlier years. Are there better ways for the journal to capture that content?



Figure 9: Jon Cartledge, *The Conference Goes On*, pencil & chalk on toned paper, 11 x 8 1/8 inches (folded), ca. 2004.

the history of the *VRA*B as well as the VRA and revisit our goals, triumphs, and struggles to meet new challenges with a wealth of knowledge and strength.

What are the next milestones for the *VRA*B? Could a name change better represent the inclusion of peer-reviewed research articles? Over the years some have suggested using “Journal” instead of “Bulletin,” something that has precedent in the publication’s title history (at least in the subtitle). Could the *VRA*B leverage collaborations or outreach to increase authorship and readership? The next issue, vol. 51, no. 2 is slated to have guest editors from outside of the VRA, an experiment that has the potential to place the journal in front of many new readers.

Are there ideas and technologies that could transform access, format, or content types? As the publication grows and adapts, we must keep an eye on

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## Appendix 1

### Reflecting on the *VRAB*

by Maureen Burns



After seeing Sara Schumacher’s open invitation to reflect on the *VRA Bulletin (VRAB)* during its fiftieth anniversary year, I showed my age and nostalgically pulled out all the hard copies that I saved over the years. I have a stack about a foot high that runs from 1998 to 2009. Since I started working in the field of visual resources (VR) in 1987, I’m not sure what happened to any earlier versions of the *VRAB*, but likely they were left behind to benefit the next person in the facilities where I worked. There were post-it notes scattered throughout the issues marking the articles that I wanted to remember to read, used as references in other publications, or thought were significant. The marked content included: changing professional roles/issues, the challenges of faculty support, digital transition, technical specifications/workflow, documentation/metadata (VRA Core, Cataloging Cultural Object (CCO), Getty Vocabularies, etc.),

open-source software, collaborative projects, digital libraries, etc. It was heartwarming to see the names of so many wonderful colleagues flip by and also to remember the wonderful conferences in which I had the good fortune to participate.

It made me think back to the first time I published in the *VRAB*. I attended a “Professionalism” luncheon at the VRA 1990 conference and Carla Freeman, then-President of VRA and VR Librarian at Alfred University, asked if anyone would take notes and consider publishing them in the *VRAB*. Being almost done with my master’s degree in art history, I worked up my newfound confidence in writing and courage, being a new member, and volunteered.<sup>34</sup> It was nothing profound, but the report illustrated many of the professional issues of concern at the time – mixed duties in small collections, how to obtain recognition for expanding responsibilities and tasks, creative ways to find added funding, etc. I continue to publish in the *VRAB*, just today completing some of the final edits to an article in partnership with Lavinia Ciuffa at the American Academy in Rome, 34 years later.

You might be asking yourself the same question I propose that we ponder, which is “Why publish in the *VRA Bulletin*?” Here are a few possible reasons: fortune (probably not in VR), glory (not applicable, our numbers are too small), gratification (if you want some pressure to catch up on the professional literature and like doing research/writing), because the editor asked me to (thank you to all the *VRAB* editors for encouraging us all to publish), meeting like-minded people (publishing helps people to know what you are thinking and doing, which might bring them to connect with you and vice versa), or promotion (maybe, not a given, but it never hurts to share your work with supervisors).

Examining my own motivations needs a little more background information. When I started in the field of visual resources, the only ways to communicate were in-person, on the telephone, or

<sup>34</sup> Maureen Burns, “Professionalism,” *Visual Resources Association Bulletin* 17, no. 1 (1990): 14-15.

in print. It was very isolating, which is probably why my generation places great value and such an emphasis on the importance of attending VRA conferences in person, using all the old and new technologies to communicate, and documenting ideas and experiences through publications.

What I value and has been my experience with publishing (not necessarily in priority order) is that it compels you to: think deeper about what you are doing and why, expose yourself to new ideas, develop knowledge, share ideas, document experiences, learn from others' experiences, preserve work in the permanent research record, involve yourself in our professional community, expand your professional network, increase the potential for interaction with your peers, open up opportunities for collaborative activities, maybe even inspire others, and, last but not least, do it for the VRA to accelerate the progression of the field of visual resources.

Although I'm close to retirement and there are generational, historical, social, educational, technological, and many other reasons that I may differ from the emerging VRA professional, I hope that my VR colleagues might be able to embrace some of these reasons to publish, in whatever forms may come our way. I, for one, would like to hear from the full range of VR professionals in various contexts – past, present, and future. We work in a small, specialized field that is eye-appealing, intellectually engaging, changing, challenging, gratifying, and even fun. I look forward to hearing your stories and reading about your adventures in the *VRAB*.