

## Exploring Our Roots

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When I was young, I did not have much interest in tagging along with my parents to family reunion visits in the area of our family roots. I guess I was “young and foolish” then in my parents’ view. Fortunately, I outgrew that attitude and came to appreciate the insights and discoveries of people and events that came before me. An African proverb says that “if we stand tall it is because we stand on the shoulders of many ancestors.” In 1976, Alex Haley popularized the term “roots” in following this proverb with his book, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. Likewise, as a former President of what was then SCAO, I find value in tracing the chronicles of the people upon whose shoulders we have built OCA. Thus, I took on the task of building upon the work of many others to archive, explore, and organize our organization’s records.

### **An Overview of OCA History**

Tracing the history of OCA through the documents left behind is an ongoing project. However, it is apparent so far that the “roots” of OCA were in 1923 (or even earlier) as the Ohio Association of Speech Teachers, becoming the Ohio Association of Public Speaking and the Speech Arts in 1926, and then the Ohio Association of College Teachers of Speech in 1932 (OACTS). However, comments in other research documents suggest we derived from other groups in the 1800s - perhaps 1871. These are undocumented comments though and not confirmed with evidence in the records found so far.

Officers were noted for 1926, so perhaps that is when the OCA formally began as the Ohio Association of Public Speaking

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and the Speech Arts. It seems to have existed through World War I. Then in 1932, records show meetings of 51 members from 19 colleges & universities in Ohio; these 51 men and women, meeting as the Ohio Association of Speech Teachers, perhaps could be considered the “Founders,” although the constitution of OACTS was not adopted until April 5, 1940. In 1964, with approval of a new constitution, the OACTS became the Ohio Speech Association (OSA). This designation continued until 1971, when the association was renamed the SCAO (the Speech Communication Association of Ohio).

Subsequently, in 2005, we became the Ohio Communication Association (OCA). At a retreat on February 24, 2004, the change of name was proposed and subsequently passed at the Fall 2004 conference. The changes in name over the years closely shadowed changes of nomenclature at the national level and preferred identities to many scholars in the field. Starting as public speaking focused, then broadening to speech and subsequently further broadening to communication were trends marking both NCA and OCA. Hence, the Ohio Communication Association has reflected with its name and structures the evolution of our field. One might ask whether Ohio has not just reflected but has been a leader in this evolution—an interesting question that might be researched in the archives.

Not just name changes but structural ones as well are chronicled in the constitutions. A significant change in the constitution created by the SCAO was a new organizational structure with presidents alternating between high school and college/university levels; the constitution also created a balanced membership of high school and college representatives on the Executive Committee. In fact, the first SCAO president for 1971-72 was Arlene Akerman of Kettering South High School. Arlene was a very prominent high school teacher and forensics coach. This balanced leadership structure continued for over two decades, maintained in constitutional changes in 1975, '77, '80, '83, '84, '92, and 1998. It appears the attempt at balance continued until declines in high school members occurred due to licensure changes and other factors.

Even aside from formal structures, the membership and leadership has shifted over the decades. Some eras were

highlighted by active dominance of the four-year research universities, but the smaller public and private colleges have always had a major presence in OCA. The more recent years of SCAO and now OCA are marked by the decline in secondary education teachers and the increased leadership of community colleges and regional campuses of the universities.

In the early decades, some names stand out. There were back in the early years some prominent leaders who are considered by many to be distinguished national leaders in the communication field. Just as the NCA began with some renowned communication teachers among the 17 founders, the OCA had some remarkable folks as founders. Among the names on the early documents are Earl W. Wiley (First President of OACTS in 1932 from Ohio State University), Lionel Crocker, Loren C. Staats, John Black, James N. Holm (all early presidents), and later J. Jeffery Auer, and Paul H. Boase. These are just a few of the names I saw in the records and I am surely overlooking some prominent leaders. There are many other names that may have been locally or regionally prominent but not as renowned nationally. Readers may want to consult the archives to see names of early leaders from your institutions.

### **Comparison to Other State Associations**

Using a Google search of the terms “state speech communication associations” and “state communication associations,” I reviewed the websites that were identified. The search results required distinguishing from the speech and hearing associations that are disorders related. From my online research of state associations, so far I have not found any originating before 1923 (Texas) and some with origins in the 1920s & 1930s (Oklahoma 1929, Arkansas 1930, Florida 1930, Pennsylvania 1939). In addition to these five, others reviewed as found online are North Dakota, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Carolinas, California, Minnesota, and Mississippi. Although over 700 listings resulted from the Google search, many were not specifically related to state associations in our field. I am aware from personal contacts that other such state organizations exist; however, they apparently do not have a web-presence. According

to the 1991-92 Speech Communication Association (SCA) Directory, there were 29 state associations listed (including Wyoming H.S. Speech Assoc.) plus the SCA of Puerto Rico. This is the most recent listing available but it is probably out of date. Another online site (published by Cool Fire Technology, 2004) lists 31 Active “State Communication Associations,” plus 14 Inactive organizations. However, all of the web pages were bad links, so it’s apparent that these listings are out of date. So far I have not found specific history or dates of origin yet for most state organizations. Even the exact date of the origin of OCA remains in controversy. Nevertheless, my conclusion at present is that we are among the oldest state communication associations, if not the oldest.

### **The OCA Archives**

The history of the OCA has been stored in many boxes that are passed on from leader to leader. My involvement in establishing formal archives began with boxes that Erin Hollenbaugh had accumulated as Executive Director. Subsequently, I discovered another collection in the possession of a past SCAO officer. Perhaps there are other materials in other hands; I hope that this article brings to light such historic items that we may include them in the archives.

Wading through these boxes, we have found collections that were assembled by others before me. Various assembled in binders and file folders, these artifacts have been sorted and arranged chronologically. In some cases, deteriorating containers have been replaced, sensitive historic documents have been scanned to digital form, and more protective plastic file boxes have replaced old cardboard boxes. The materials are being organized into (1) a box of items to consider for disposal (having personal IDs or expired records not necessary to retain), (2) organized boxes of records to be maintained by the Executive Director for a period of years, and (3) boxes of history to protect, digitize, and maintain in a permanent Archive (housing has not yet been determined). A table at the end of the article provides a listing of the archive contents at present. The listed items are in various binders, notebooks, plastic envelopes, and file folders, partially

organized into four covered plastic file boxes for protection of documents. I am listing them here for general documentation of sources and to invite colleagues to use them for research projects. For example, there are references to the association during the war years and postwar issues that could be an interesting source for research. The evidence here is that “fledgling” groups (Ohio Association of Speech Teachers 1923 and Public Speaking and the Speech Arts 1926) existed after World War I until OACTS formed in 1932. Also, the latter organization continued to function during World War II.

As the Archives exist now there is redundancy with multiple copies of some items (as is apparent in the tabled listing of items). These materials have been compiled and organized by a number of people over the decades. Especially, the Akron MA thesis by Kristan Leedy Endress appears to be the only comprehensive history study that has been undertaken. Therefore, it is a seminal work to include in the Archives for consultation and use. Other items are missing for some years and indexing of other records is incomplete. Additionally, some of the materials especially susceptible to deterioration I have scanned to digital files stored on a dedicated flash drive. We, in fact, would like to have the entire collection digitized for protection and ease of use by others.

Much research is possible using the records of the Archives. Analyses could be conducted with the data to investigate many questions. These include questions pertaining to trends in the organization:

- *What was the membership per year and what were the largest member years?*
- *What were the levels of membership throughout the years—high school, community college, university, on-academic careers?*
- *How has the structure of the organization changed over the years?*

Other analyses can be related to outside events in the records:

- *How did World Wars I and II impact the organization?*
- *Were areas of the association involved in the wars?*
- *What were the changes in forensics over the years?*

- *What broadcasters had connections to the association?*
- *How were the media used for news and publication?*
- *How did school certification/licensure changes impact the organization?*
- *What impact did college schedule changes (e.g., quarters to semesters) have on the organization?*

There are probably many other areas of research that I have not identified here.

It is interesting to explore how our association has evolved over many decades. Formal names and structures have changed as well as shifting areas of leadership. Educators from secondary schools, community colleges, small and large universities, as well as non-teaching career professionals have all contributed to this durability. As one of the oldest state communication associations in the nation, it has nevertheless survived and thrived. A number of such state groups have not survived or have gone dormant for a time. Sure, OCA has had its ups and downs in membership, finances, and conference attendance. However, it has continued with apparently no period of inactivity—even continuing during wars. To all of you who are or have been at some time members and participants, you have played a part. Take pride in your role in the history of the Ohio Communication Association.

### **OCA Archives Table of Contents**

1. OACTS Records 1932-1945 with handwritten notes on meetings & officers 1923-31.
2. Records of OACTS 1932-1939.
3. College Notebook of Original Records 1932-1940.
4. Newsletters 1938 to 1945.
5. OACTS Records 1945-49 & other items (tentatively in two manila file folders)
6. OACTS Records 1945-1950.
7. OACTS Constitution & Records 1940-on.
8. OACTS Records 1949-53.
9. OACTS Records 1950-58 (tabbed by Academic Yrs.).
10. SCAO Journal Subscription records for 1973-74.
11. File folders (in 10 file hangers) of membership & financial records for 70s & 80s.
12. SCAO Bumper Stickers “Teaching Speech Is Sound Business” (1979, 10 copies).
13. Kristan Leedy Endress MA Thesis, *The Development of the Speech Communication Association of Ohio: An Historical Study*, University of Akron, 1984.
14. Financial and membership records for 2002.
15. Financial records for 2002-2005.
16. Records & correspondence of 2006-07.
17. Financial records for several recent years up to 2008.
18. Copies of Conference Programs for each year.
19. Copies of the Journal for each year.
20. Cassette audiotapes of speeches and interviews by members.