

*Office of the President*

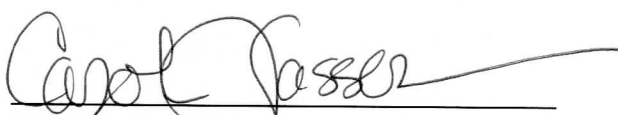
SHEAR Distinguished Service Award  
for  
**Michael A. Morrison**

Michael A. Morrison grew up in rusty southeast Michigan and spent at least one summer closer to a Bessemer converter than probably anyone else in this room. After high school Mike served in the United States Air Force from 1967 through 1970. From 1971 to 75 he attended Henry Ford Community College, Dearborn, and the University of Michigan, Dearborn, earning AA and BA degrees with honors. He went on to earn his MA (1981) and PhD (1989) from Michigan, Ann Arbor, where he studied with Bradford Perkins and Mills Thornton, and where he met his life partner, historian Nancy Gabin. In 1983 Nancy took a position at Purdue, and in 1991 we were privileged to hire Mike, who quickly became a “rock star” in the classroom and served us for twenty-five years. Mike won every conceivable teaching award at Purdue, and in 1998 the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching named him Indiana Professor of the Year. His staple offering was the US survey to 1877 until, in 2000, he developed a new course on race and popular music called “Society, Culture, and Rock and Roll.”

Michael was best known to readers in our own field for his work on slavery and southwestern expansion, especially his penetrating and durable monograph, *Slavery and the American West: The Eclipse of Manifest Destiny and the Coming of the Civil War* (1997). Among his prominent journal articles is “Westward the Curse of Empire: Texas Annexation and the American Whig Party,” *Journal of the Early Republic* (1990)—for which he won the SHEAR Best Article Prize. His published legacy includes as well several edited collections, a baker’s dozen of original essays, and over sixty book reviews. In his work as author and editor Mike developed a trademark style that he often called “steamboat gothic”—part E. B. White, part James K. Polk. He loved language and deployed it with wit and precision.

Mike’s service to SHEAR began in 1989 when he signed on as Ralph Gray’s assistant at the *Journal of the Early Republic*, published in those days at IUPUI. During Ralph’s sabbatical Mike piloted the journal alone, and in 1993 he approached me with a proposal to facilitate Ralph’s retirement and move the journal to Purdue. From 1994 through 2004 we worked in improbable harness—the volcanic Irishman and the gloomy Norse—to keep the journal alive and well. Mike’s attention to detail and commitment to technical quality kept to a minimum the number of times I had to apologize in print for such stunning failures as a misspelled word in a running head (my fault). During those ten years we became fast friends, and Mike became a central player in the SHEAR community. He served often on conference panels and program committees. He helped shape the plans for the move to Philadelphia in 2004. Together he and I launched the SHEAR-NEH-Library Company summer seminars in which some of you participated. Working quietly in the background as a peer reviewer and editorial consultant, Mike assisted several dozen SHEAR regulars as they scored their first publications, first and second promotions, and other important steps on the stairway to academic success. His generosity and personal engagement were legendary. In the spring of 2016 he was elected to the presidency of SHEAR for a term that would have begun tonight.

Mike Morrison was born in Michigan in 1948; he died May 14, 2017, at the age of 68. He and Nancy were married in 1984, and together they raised two children, Natty and Katie. Mike was a passionate family man, a generous community volunteer, and a dedicated parishioner at Blessed Sacrament and later St. Mary’s Catholic Church. His sudden death has left us with many voids.

  
Carol Lasser, President

July 22, 2017

(Written and presented by John Lauritz Larson.)