

An SfAA Oral History Interview with J. Tom May

The Development of SfAA's Award Program, Annual Meetings, and Administration

Tom May served the Society until his death in February 2018. Initially he was Treasurer and then, starting in the mid-1980s, he managed the Society's business affairs. This led to him being Executive Director. The focus of this transcript was the development of his friendship and work relationship with Peter Kong-ming New and the innovation of the award which bears Peter's name; the creation of the Society's business affairs function; and Tom's perspective on organizing annual meetings, among other topics. Tom earned his PhD in Medical Sociology from Tulane and was on the faculty of the University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center in Oklahoma City. In 1994, he was named to the David Rose Boyd Professorship in public health. He also did graduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh, where he first met Peter K. New. This interview, one of two, was done by Don Stull at Tom's home in Oklahoma City in September 2017. The original audio and transcript are located in the SfAA Collection at the Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Libraries. The transcript was edited and abridged by John van Willigen.

STULL: Today is Friday, September 22nd. This is Don Stull and I'm interviewing Tom May for the Society for Applied Anthropology Oral History Project, in his home in Oklahoma City.

I know Peter Kong-ming New was very important in your professional growth and after you finished your PhD, you and he remained close. Can you talk a bit about how he influenced you? My understanding is that he's a major reason why you joined the SfAA.

MAY: He was an extraordinarily interesting person, and I didn't find out much about his background until later, just before his death, when he was doing a study of his grandfather. He was Chinese-American, was very tall and curious in physical appearance. He talked very little about his background when I first knew him. I started work for him in the late spring of 1962, after finishing my master's. He had just arrived at the School of Public Health at Pittsburgh. He had joined a Social Science Unit. I went to work for Peter, that summer, as a research assistant. What I found going on there was a lot more to my own interests at the time. For example, that summer, we did a study of physicians and healthcare providers in Northampton County in Eastern Pennsylvania. I'm a graduate student, his research assistant. He rented an apartment in Allentown. We'd go over there, there's a kitchen. He brings all his utensils and we holed up there and worked all day long. Friday evening, we

would get in a car, drive to New York City, and he'd stay with [an] old buddy from graduate school. We'd have mapped out an art exhibit Saturday morning, a matinee at student prices Saturday afternoon, an Off-Broadway play Saturday night, and then we'd go through this whole thing. Well, for a kid from Beeville, Texas, this is just, you know eye-opening and, and wonderful. And then go back Sunday night and do this project.

He was also very skilled at being Peter New, at taking a topic that the School of Public Health asked him to do. Why were health departments in small communities not functioning very well? So he took that, and we finished a report to the state health department, but also, he began to look at the types of issues that were brought to health departments at the county level, and began to see an increasing secularization of the role of the physician. And we got a very good article out of that. And so, I found him a very attractive teacher in the sense that he could manage both those things simultaneously. He also, had a certain familiarity with elite boarding schools and prominent national universities that, without, what would you say, advertising, which I found very interesting. I did not necessarily come to that as a novice. I mean, we grew up at a time when, even if you were at St. Mary's University [in Texas], in my group, you were expected to read the *New Yorker* and know what was going on, that sort of thing. But, it was a very different type of graduate teaching, which I found, just responded.

Let me give you one anecdote. I've thought about this several times. In those days, when you were a graduate student, it was important to be up-to-date about the most current research. I'm in the library, looking at the stacks of new books, and here's a book called the *Urban Villagers*, by a person named Herbert Gans. It's about urban renewal in the North End of Boston. So, Gans goes there and lives while urban renovation is going on, you know, and, and I thought to myself damn, this is just what I would like to do. It's here and now, it's using applied social sciences, et cetera, et cetera.

The next day, I go charging into the office, and I have a little space right next to Peter, and before I started to work, I started telling him, "I've got to tell you about this book I discovered." And so he stops what he's doing, and he said, "Well, who's the author?" And I said, "Gans." So he writes the name down and he said well, "What's it about?" And, so I go through the whole thing and he--we went through about an hour, he's asking me questions. Did he actually live there? What did he do? How did he take notes? You know, we went through the whole thing. So, I left that conversation thinking my God, you know, I've discovered this. It was just

wonderful. A month later, I'm looking at the journals and run across a recent issue of the *American Journal of Sociology*. There's the articles, the book reviews. Gans's book is being reviewed, I said great, I leaf through it, the review is by Peter New. (Stull laughs) And I almost cried. I didn't want to go to work the next day. He never said a word about it. A couple years later, we were in Boston, at a sociology meeting, and he just was in a crowd, and he just very nicely grabbed my arm and went over and introduced Herb Gans. But it was that sort of allowing you to make the discovery, which I've always thought was iconic, of the way he went about it.

STULL: He must have been a rare individual.

MAY: He was. There's some background between the two of them, he and his wife Mary Louie New. Peter spoke very little about his background. Mary was totally different. The critical thing was that she was a very big deal. When she was accepted at Berkeley for undergraduate school, was not permitted to stay in the women's dormitory because she was Chinese-American. This is 1944, so what they did with Chinese-American students was to house them with faculty as domestic servants. So, Mary took me by the place in Berkeley where she cleaned the kitchen for a math professor, in order to go to Berkeley. When she finished, she did a master's degree and then was recruited to run Dick [Richard] Remington's biostat lab at the University of Michigan. When I met them in Pittsburgh, she was under contract with Harvard School of Public Health, on this huge fertility study. She was a big deal in her field but again, as I say, people didn't often look at spouses separately. She was extraordinary in her own way. So the two of them were quite different, but quite unique.

STULL: I want to talk about Mary and about the founding of the Peter K. New Award trust.

MAY: Yes. I think that's a critical point, to set the background. I mentioned, in a prior correspondence, that I had uncovered the letter from the nominating committee, in I think 1981, to Peter, saying that he was now elected president, and that the vote had been tied between him and I believe it was Lisa Peattie, who was I think Sol Tax's daughter, [Editor: Robert Redfield's daughter] maybe somebody else. The vote had been tied and they decided to flip a coin and Peter won, so he became president.

STULL: And they told him that?

MAY: Yes. I've got the copy of the letter for you. So he became president in 1981, at the time I was not that involved in the society.

STULL: But you were already a member though.

MAY: I was a member because they had published an article for me, I was the treasurer too, but the people who were making the decisions were largely people that I didn't know that well and were a bit older; Harland Padfield, Will Sibley, and folks like that. So, I was doing the usual sorts of thing. I was publishing like crazy. There was a four-year period when I put out, I think seven refereed articles and three chapters in books and things like that. I had two very good PhD students who were--three; two in sociology, one in anthropology. I had a courtesy appointment in adolescent medicine, so I was just banging away.

STULL: Can I back up for just a second?

MAY: Yes.

STULL: How did you get to OU?

MAY: Oh. So, I'm at Tulane, finishing up, in 1968. I finished my exam, I'm doing a dissertation, and there are a couple of things that come up that are possible. One was, a position at the University of Buffalo, as kind of a low-level assistant, with the dean, and there I would be doing liaison with medical students and teaching medical history. Another was the University of Oklahoma, there a postdoc, in Tulane, working with my major thesis advisor at the time. And so he asked me to come up, because they were going to get an elective in history of medicine started and they were going to try to develop a history of medicine of the state of Oklahoma. So, for better or worse, I signed on with Oklahoma in the spring of '68. And then came up here that August, had a year off to finish the thesis, did some teaching of medical undergraduates on an elective basis, and then the School of Public Health started the following year. So I held joint appointments in public health and in the College of Medicine.

STULL: Social scientists in medical schools were pretty rare at that time, so you must have been a pioneer in that, in that movement of social science into medical education, education of medical students, and then putting medical sociology and things like that into medical schools.

MAY: Yes. Our point of leverage was the requirement that medical undergraduates have a course in the behavioral sciences. So, when I arrived, there was an informal grouping, mainly social psychologists, from over in psychiatry, and I was with them, and we put together kind of a slapstick course in behavioral sciences, which all the medical students had to take. But principally, the idea was that they would, with my assistance, get this history of medicine of Oklahoma started.

STULL: [At that time] you're member of SfAA.

MAY: I'm a member and I'm the treasurer, but I was not that invested in the whole issue of whether or not SfAA is a separate entity or not, a decision that grew out of the problem with the Internal Revenue, in 1984. I don't recall, having a very, very strong opinion, to the point that I might disagree with Harland or Sibley or others. I thought that the people who had held those strong opinions, and that there would be blood on the floor, so to speak. That's my recollection of that particular decision.

Now, when the board elected not to dissolve their corporate status and join "triple-A", American Anthropological Association, then formed the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology. It seemed to me at the time, that this was not something that could exist side-by-side, without a lot of clashes. Looking back, I was struck with the fact at the time, there was a lot of cannibalism going on. For example, Society at the time, had a Mead Award, after Margaret Mead, which the Society started, and which was later joined with and jointly sponsored by the triple-A. They also had a Malinowski Award. At one of the board meetings shortly after 1984, a former president comes to the board and says the leader of the School for American Research [Editor: Now called School for Advanced Research], would like to have a more applied orientation. His board members would like that. Why don't we jointly sponsor the Malinowski with the School of American Research. I didn't get involved in the fight, but I thought this was just bartering away, one of the things that they had to do.

A separate, second example, within at least a year, the sitting president of the Society, when we had a board meeting, had two chairs at the head of the table; one for himself and one for the president of NAPA [National Association for the Practice of Anthropology]. And I was struck with the fact that it was almost as if SfAA elected to be separate, but everybody was hovering around and trying to grab any of the available pieces. I remember being struck with that at the time and in going back over my notes.

STULL: Well, let's back up for just a second. You know, as you said, the Internal Revenue Service went to the American Anthropological Association, and said you all are managing the affairs of all these different groups, SfAA being one, but there were other ones as well, and that you're making money on this and so if you want to keep your, your nonprofit status, you have to either, dissolve your relationship with these organizations, or they have to become part of your organization. Correct me at any point, if I'm wrong about that. And so that was 1982 and Harland Padfield was president and I may be wrong, so if I am, I want you to correct me, but Ted Downing and Sue Ellen Jacobs, and you, were, you were the treasurer then.

MAY: Correct.

STULL: And so it came to a vote. I was, like you in the '70s, in the '80s I was a member, but I wasn't all that active. But I remember distinctly, standing in the back of the room at, I guess it was at the SfAA Annual Meeting, it must have been, and there were all these heated discussions and we voted that we had been formed as an independent society in 1941 and by God, we were going to stay an independent society.

MAY: Yes.

STULL: It's often called the split of the triple-A, but it wasn't really a split, because we were just having--triple-A managing our books basically. Doing subscriptions and doing the kind of stuff that a business office would normally do.

MAY: Yes.

STULL: And so then we took our membership and left.

MAY: Yes. My understanding is that a not for profit organization, to retain its tax-exempt status, should not earn more than 18 or 20 percent of its revenue from activities not directly associated with that corporation. When they took a look at the triple-A, they found that American Archaeological Association [Editor: Society for American Archaeology] and several separate corporations, which the triple-A was managing, netted the triple-A extraordinary revenues which exceeded this.

STULL: I see.

MAY: So then you're absolutely right, SfAA was formed in 1941. In 1946 they got--received not for profit status from the IRS, and over a period of time, from 1946 forward, they were either managed by the president or, in the case of William Foote Whyte, he took it on at Cornell, in the School of Labor Relations, for several years. It was in the, I believe--and I need to be checked on this. It was in the 1970s, that one of the presidents arranged, with the triple-A, for a management contract, which then ended up in this thing.

STULL: Yeah. If we want to just continue on the timeline of that.

MAY: Yes.

STULL: So, this vote occurred, my notes say 1982, but I--that may not be the case. But there was a special meeting of the SfAA in Denver, in 1985.

MAY: Correct.

STULL: And at that meeting, my understanding is that you proposed--you were the treasurer at that time and you proposed to manage the SfAA finances because--let me back up again, I guess--after we split, we contracted with a group named Bergman and Associates, in Washington, D.C., to manage our business affairs, and within a couple years, we were broke, or nearly broke.

MAY: Correct.

STULL: And so then, in 1985, you said well, I will manage what's left of our, of our finances, is that more or less correct?

MAY: That sets that larger framework and I think it also speaks volumes to how naïve I was. When the board said we will not dissolve our corporate relationships, and the triple-A formed NAPA, then we had to--we being the board and the membership--had to find an alternative management firm. This would have been '84, '85, in there, we can get the exact date I think. I remember distinctly searching for some firms in Chicago and Washington, and going with Sue Ellen Jacobs, myself, and another officer, to interview these people. We signed a contract with Bergman and within a year, it became clear that financially it was not working. At the time, I had a project, in the Department of Pediatrics, a project dealing with adolescent medicine, and they had a computer person over there. And so I reasoned somewhat stupidly, or naively,

that I would trade some services and I'll just try to keep this going in lieu of renewing the contract with Bergman at a point when our bank account was under \$30,000.

STULL: And was that because they were just ripping us off or...? I mean why did we go financially, to the edge of the cliff?

MAY: I'm not sure. I know that the officers, when we interviewed Bergman, were somewhat naïve as to the fee we paid and the way in which we would regularize income. So I think for example, I thought that perhaps, during that changeover, there may have been, loss of membership records, but whatever it was, the money was not coming in but the fee to Bergman had been contracted and was due. So it simply, was not working. I remember distinctly, the meeting in Toronto, the annual meeting in Toronto, when we were into the Bergman contract and Bergman shows up himself, flies in, and hosts this very gracious dinner with very expensive wine, and cognac after the meal, and then the next day flies back to Washington. And I thought to myself, who is paying for this? So, it was simply not working and, and I took the rather naïve step of thinking that I could pull together, in an exchange sort of relationship, some tasks, like managing the database, exploring annual meeting sites, oversighting the journals. Now, there's a crucial point here, and I'm not sure, I'm pretty sure that I'm accurate at it, but around, I would say--I think the key was the meeting in Santa Fe, Nineteen Eighty-nine. And the preparation for the meeting. I became convinced, in I would say in about 1986, '87, that there were some key people who were interested vitally, in having SfAA survive and thrive. These people did not--the difference was that these people were not bound to the triple-A, and these people were not necessarily anthropology people, and they were--it's very distinct in my mind. Sue Ellen Jacobs was from a nursing school, Erve Chambers, had a vastly different view of where the society should go. Don Stull was very interested in the annual meeting and making it distinct. So I think I was very impressed with the possibility that there are a cadre of people that could revive this whole thing, stabilize it and that's very clear in my mind. So, when we talk about, the Peter New Award, and getting that off the ground, that happened within a context of realizing that, that there were a group in the society which did not see themselves as necessarily an adjunct of the triple-A.

STULL: You started managing the logistics for the annual meeting--again, correct me if I'm wrong on some of these dates--around 1985. You were still the treasurer.

MAY: Yes.

STULL: And so you--that started you down this long path to becoming, in my mind,

sort of this, supernatural organizer and manager of annual meetings.

MAY: Yes.

STULL: I met you, I think for the first time, I'm not sure, but I think in Tampa, in 1988.

MAY: Yes.

STULL: When I had been asked to be the program chair for the '89 meeting in Santa Fe. And then I met you and Neil Hann [Editor: Neil Hann is the present Executive Director] in Santa Fe later that summer of '88, and I sort of like a puppy, followed you around as you negotiated with, with hotels and all of that stuff.

MAY: Yes.

STULL: And, and the '89 meeting, I think, either the Tampa meeting, but I think the Santa Fe meeting, was the first one to crack a thousand, and that was sort of a benchmark. And since then, the annual meetings have ultimately become our number one revenue stream, and where now, if we don't at least double what we got in Santa Fe in '89, if we're not in the two-thousand range, you and a lot of us think, well that wasn't a very successful meeting because we didn't have at least a couple of thousand people running around.

MAY: Right.

STULL: I just wanted you to talk a bit about your secrets for success in arranging for annual meetings, and I think it's always been sort of my jaw has always dropped and I've always been in awe of how you do that.

MAY: You're very kind. And I remember distinctly, our conversation in Santa Fe that summer, because you suggested one, in a conversation, going up in a walk around town, that maybe the resolution of the drug problem in the United States was to legalize drugs. And so I'm thinking to myself, now that's a very different thing. Whatever the case, a person that I omitted, who I found very compelling, in allowing me to think of the Society as separate, was Gil Kushner, from the University of Tampa [Editor: University of South Florida.] And it was around the planning for the annual meeting, first in Tampa and then in Santa Fe, that this became so clear to me, that this was a very distinct organization. Dealing with hotels, and the hospitality industry, is not that difficult. It is perhaps difficult for people who spend their entire

life, discussing issues in department meetings. I found that the hospitality industry people were essentially, very above board and very straightforward with you, as long as you made sure that you got everything you wanted in a contract. I always felt that the best thing to do, as with anything, is to set up competing opportunities. So, if we're looking at a site in Portland, Oregon, I want to be able to tell hotel salespeople that we're also looking at Seattle and Vancouver, and whoever gives us the best thing. So, I didn't feel out of my element there, and enjoyed the thing.

A little later, we'll talk about the shift to the annual meeting as the major revenue stream. This, this was sort of common sense. Once we got past the notion that selection to the program was the key reason a person attended and second, we didn't have to exclude 50 percent of the abstracts submitted to have a good program. So, we, in a sense, opened the door very, very wide, and now, so but let's get back on point.

STULL: What is the point? Oh you're--you were talking about your secrets for... I was asking you about your secret.

MAY: So, I think the secret is treating the hospitality industry people, in a fair way, understanding that the day you sign the contract, that's it, anything else you want, you pay for, and that when you come to them and they tell you, we can give you a room, a guest room, for \$175, and then you don't be embarrassed and come back and say, if you knock that down to \$145, we can sign the contract this week. The, the other thing that I think was important is I don't think we ever tried to embarrass the salespeople. I think we were always aboveboard with them. So for example, the meeting in Santa Fe last March was arranged through a salesperson, that I had worked with before, and she came to me with a package and the package said all the things we wanted. And she had contacted the other hotels. So, instead of me having to go to the Inn at Loretto and negotiate. She had already gotten, the Inn at Loretto salesperson to come in at an extraordinary discount, and how she had done it was to pull up the data from the previous meeting and say look it, here's what they can bring to town.

Now, the other thing is the Society, has gotten into a custom of meeting at a time of the year which is very good for some venues and very bad for others. So, late March, early April for Santa Fe is perfect, because it is after the snow and before the summer travelers. It's horrible for Austin, Texas, because late March and April are all the scholastic events, high school events, which come to Austin. It's horrible for New Orleans. The interesting thing is when we arranged the meeting in 1999, for San

Francisco, the board was intent on having it in Austin. I went down to Austin and spent a couple days. I tried to get back with them and the board--and I said you can't make it work. Austin had, at the time, a shortage of hotel rooms. They also had the scholastic thing. I flew back to Oklahoma City and got a cheap flight the next morning to San Francisco, and within three days, had signed a contract, or negotiated the outlines of a contract in San Francisco, that were cheaper than Austin, Texas. And, it was not a lovely hotel, you know the venue, and so timing is very, very important. There are some places we can do and some places that we can't, because of the time of the year.

STULL: This brings up, your philosophy, your fiscal philosophy, reminds me of my late aunt, who lived to be a hundred and died last year. She was a child of the Depression and she never threw anything away. She saved everything, she was the original, reduce, reuse, recycle person. And, and having known you for a long time, you're as tight as a drum when it comes to the Society's money, which is I think, one of the reasons why we are so fiscally healthy. But it's also brought you in conflict with, with SfAA leadership from time to time, and membership, or certain members anyway. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

MAY: Yes. From the very beginning, once Neil and I begin to manage the Society, there were a couple of things that were very clear. The first of which was we are not a discipline-based association, such as the American Anthropological Association, the American Political Science Association, et cetera. Therefore, we do not have a natural constituency. We cannot go to all the departments in the United States and say your faculty and students should be members, et cetera. So we were essentially, we reason, a second membership. We were a group that a person might belong to if they were in an anthropology department but wanted something more than triple-A. That's one thing. I always felt that that recognition required that we maintain limited dues.

A second and very separate line of thinking, which I understood very early on, was when you increase the dues of an association, no one ever decreases the dues. You always find a way to spend the money. It's sort of the classic notion of ownership, that nobody takes a rented car to the car wash before you turn it in. So my thinking always was, the thing that will allow the Society to survive is if you constrain the dues, which means that you have to limit your expenditures, because you can't cut the dues later, and those were important things. The only way to do that was to operate the way in which a business would operate, which is if you want to do something, you figure a way to pay for it before you do it. So, for example, if you want to publish a second

journal such as *Practicing Anthropology*, you figure out how much it costs and how to do it, how to pay for it, before you start publishing it. I thought there was nothing revolutionary in that, so much as it was, the way you would run--if I were running a research grant, at the university, and I overspent my budget, or I didn't have it planned out or I couldn't account for it, why they'd throw me into the, you know, the lawyers would have me.

STULL: Yeah, but you would certainly never give them any money back. You would spend every last penny.

MAY: Absolutely.

STULL: And you don't sound like an academic when you're talking like this. I mean academics are not--at least the ones in my experience, don't know much about money, don't really like to think much about money, and are spendthrifts until the money runs out. And you, on the other hand, have been consistent, to a fault, and often resulting in butting heads with various officers, saying no we've got to make money, we've got to be frugal, we've got to keep our purse strings, keep it tight, a tight rein on our purse strings, and we can't do it, whatever it is, unless we have money for it upfront. Does that come from--where does that come from? Does it come from the Bergman event in which we almost went broke, or are you--did you really want to be an accountant, instead of a medical sociologist? I mean, I just don't quite understand that.

MAY: There are a couple of things. One. I did have considerable experience at the university where, at the Medical School in particular, where, if we tried to spend all the money we would have someone from accounting looking over our shoulder. So, my experience with them was that they were very careful, and you had to follow rules. I think the second thing is, I felt obstinate at times and you might even say single-minded, because I did not feel that there were resonating opinions on the board, particularly when the board was entirely academic. My spouse was running a private foundation and she had a board of about twenty people; fully 50 percent of them were not academics. So she often contrasted discussions within her board meetings, with those in mine, and...

STULL: Those were interesting conversations.

MAY: They were. And they were always cordial, but they were--the discussion included vastly different approaches. So to circle back to your question. I'm not sure

that I would say that I was completely frugal, but rather, there were important lessons to be learned. And secondly, the other thing that I became very convinced of is--and this, this was critical. I became very convinced by the mid-'90s, that there was enough of a sense of participation, within the Society, that it could truly become, what Merrill Eisenberg called a giving society. So, I became very convinced, after we started getting the student travel awards, that members were willing to donate if you took the time to ask them, and proved that you would be a good steward of their money. So, for example the first one we did was the Spicer, the Student Travel Award. Someone introduced me to one of the Spicer children, I think it was Gil Kushner. She complained that they tried to give \$3,500 to the American Anthropological Association, for some kind of honor, in memory of her father. The American Anthropological Association turned it down and said that didn't reach a threshold. I had a conversation with Kushner and with Art Gallaher, and they said nonsense, and within six or eight months, ah the two of them put together a group of people who doubled that. And then so it was, it was a recognition that you simply had to find the right thing and had to ah, let people know that you were going to take care of their money. So, doing Del Jones, doing all the others, was just following the recipe.

STULL: Well let's circle back around.

MAY: Okay.

STULL: Ah, we talked earlier about Peter New and about his, wife Mary, and the first--well, we had the Malinowski and the Mead Award, which were distinguished awards for professionals, either at the end of their career or in the--or for up and comers. But the New, Peter New Student Award, was the first student award the Society developed, and you were integrally involved in that, and then out of that, it seems to me, come all these others that we've started to talk about.

MAY: Right.

STULL: But let's back up and talk about the, the first one, and how that came to be, and then how it spawned, what we now have, is a whole bunch of awards.

MAY: Yes. Peter died at the end of December, in 1985. He had gone to Hong Kong, right after the triple-A meeting in Washington, D.C. He and I had a long dinner and it was obvious that his health was not good. He'd had cardiovascular problems a couple years before. He flew to Hong Kong, to follow up on a research paper he was

writing on his grandfather, and he stayed with his last PhD student, Yuet Cheung. And it was sort of a make contact with my past. After--beginning about the 25th, I received calls from him, from Hong Kong. His wife had engaged a lawyer and was suing the University of South Florida, where he was on the faculty. I regularly tried to do something, it was unsuccessful, and he flew back, directly from Hong Kong to New York, rented a car, drove to Toronto where she was, and within a day had a heart attack and died.

In establishing the award, there are a couple of points where I was very naïve and learned a lot, and there were a couple of points where I just stumbled on to things. Let's start with the naivete. I initially thought that I could identify a group of Peter's friends and colleagues, and former students, and send them a letter and say we would like to do this.

STULL: Can I just back up for just one second? Did the idea for the award come from you or from Mary, or some combination?

MAY: It's a mixture. I'll come back to where I was but let me respond to your thing. After his death, Mary began shopping around, and so she--I would get a lengthy phone call and she would say, "I'm going to give a thousand dollars to the class of 1949, at Dartmouth, which was Peter's class," and I said fine. And then another call would come later and say, I've decided to give twelve hundred dollars to Eaglebrook School, where--a residential private school in New England where Peter had gone.

STULL: And they had no children, I take it.

MAY: They had no children, correct. And so, she would ask what did I think of that and I said Mary, it's all your thing. I then began to think this is not really going to have any kind of impact, so--and at the time, I had begun to develop a very clear sense of the fact that the Society could in fact be a viable organization, based on some of these people that I had dealt with, the Tampa meeting, and the Santa Fe meeting. I think the idea of a research-aware, student research award, must have come from someone else. I'm unsure of that. I do know that two things happened. One, in the spring of 1986, I went down to Tampa and packed up Peter's office for her, and separated things, spent a week there, and got it all cleared out. She was still ruminating, what she would do. By the spring of 1987, I went up to Rockport, where they had a house on the water, and packed that up for Mary. By that time, Mary had decided to sell the Rockport house and move back to California, so she had a lot of

money. Between sometime after 1986, there began to gel, the idea of a student research award, and it became obvious to me that Mary had resources and needed a tax deduction, when she was with us still. Rockport is a quaint little community on the water. Peter was, at Tufts University at the time. He retained an architect to build a summer place, on stilts. So, there are all of these New England houses on the waterfront and here is this modern design, elevated above the tree line, that this young architect put together, and Mary, the spouse, was embarrassed to death because it cost \$40,000. When she sold the Rockport house, some of his, Peter's students... This would have been in 1987, some of Peter's students got together and discussed whether we wanted to buy it, which would have been a big deal. She sold it for almost half a million dollars. So she had the need for tax deduction. I thought that I could raise additional money with his friends and students, which as I said was naïve. I spent a lot of time riding around to these people at the American Sociological Association, et cetera, et cetera, trying to see if I could put together a committee. It was not effective.

What was effective was her initial contribution of \$20,000, and the board of the Society accepting it and matching some of it, and then a subsequent contribution of another fifteen or twenty. So, by ah, late 1987, '88, we've got her contribution coming in, we've got a cadre of people who are very interested in the Society rejuvenating itself, and we've got this notion of a student research award. And again I say, I know how the first and the second part worked. I'm not sure where the idea of a student research award came in.

STULL: Well, I know I--you invited me to a dinner with her once, it was at some annual meeting, and so I know you were, at that time, working on getting her to give, and you still hadn't, hadn't pulled her in yet, to a contribution.

MAY: Right.

STULL: So I know that you worked very hard on convincing her to give the money to the Society for Applied Anthropology.

MAY: Yes. Now, there was a period, um, when some thought was given to having a separate entity. So for example, Sara [Editor: Sara Wilson] has uncovered some correspondence that suggested that when we discussed, when we were in the initial stages, we discussed the idea of a separate entity to manage it, with some kind of connection, but not a controlling connection, to the SfAA. And in fact, I outlined this to my brother, in a letter, he's an attorney, and his response was, no, put it under the

Society, because it will have institutional support and you need that stability, which is what we wisely did. Circling back, the learning process was, that if you can get the money in the bank, then that's good, don't spend it before it gets there. Very interesting, we made a very big mistake with the money from the Poarch Creek, for the [Anthony] Paredes thing, which was finalized a couple of years ago. There, we went to the trouble of setting up a committee of interested people, set a few targets, uh, and then, at some critical point, the widow, said we've got to get the leadership of the Poarch Band Creek Indians involved, and so she took the ball, she approached them, asked them for \$100,000. They gave us \$100,000 and then, there was no impetus to raise any additional funds, obviously, which was, I should have understood at first, given the experience we had with the Peter New thing.

STULL: Well, you got the Peter New Award, you got the money from Mary, and initially, the reward, which involves a competition of students and a research paper, and then the students receive a cash money prize and also, a very beautiful Steuben glass piece...

MAY: Crystal.

STULL: Crystal, yes, thank you. That has expanded from one prize, one award, to now, three right, is that correct?

MAY: Correct. When the award was first given, the prize was \$1,500, and there was not designated, a second or third prize. We cobbled together a couple of things that the Society paid for or the Society sponsored, such as the special session at the annual meeting. It's interesting, and I remember this distinctly, when I brought the package of the tour of the award to the board, a student member said, "How much would the Steuben crystal trophy cost?" And I said about \$300, and, and this particular student representative said that's foolish, add the \$300 to the prize. And, I don't know how I got out of that dilemma, probably not very diplomatically, but to me, the student crystal was emblematic of the whole thing. So we went from a single prize of \$1,500, in 1990, to now there are three prizes, if the quality so warrants, with the top prize being \$3,500, and travel expenses to attend the meeting, and second and third prizes.

I pulled up, from the files, a projection that I did in August of '06, where I talked about the future growth of the award, and documented the history of the award. I had talked about various ways in which we could enhance the principal to reach--the thought was, in '06, that I hoped, in ten years, to have principal that would allow a

prize in the range of five to eight thousand dollars. The idea, that incorporated my contribution and trying to get some additional contributions from other students of Peter's. We're not there yet. The trustees, I believe have the view that increasing it to that level might be a bit exorbitant. I suspect that, my thinking was that, how are you going to get national recognition.

STULL: It's the largest student prize in the social sciences now, anyway, isn't it?

MAY: Yes.

STULL: Our first student prize.

MAY: Student prize, yes. I think that they will begin to see things like that as a way in which, the Society can gain recognition beyond its membership, et cetera.

STULL: Now, you made a significant contribution to the New Trust. Mary has passed away hasn't she?

MAY: Yes, last year.

STULL: And, and did her estate leave additional funds?

MAY: That was a big disappointment. After Mary moved to California, back to where her family was. She had relatives there, who took care of her, off and on, but all along, I thought that I would be able to get her to contribute as well. I went out to see her usually twice a year, but mainly, it was to see the relatives, her nephew. When she reached the point where she was medicated, she was not really very clear, and the relatives were not interested in the Peter New Award. When I mentioned at the outset, that they were very different people, that was one of the striking things. Mary was Chinese-American, from a very working-class family. Her brother--she had several siblings who lived a long time. Her father was a farmer, who lost a lot of his property in the war. Peter was from a family that was very highly respected and went back to this group of what was called the "fortunate sons," who were sent to the United States in 1872, to learn about modernity and to take that back to China. So, his grandfather went to Exeter as a young boy and it's very interesting. He, Peter, retained contact, without ever telling us what it was about, with these families where his grandfather had boarded, in New England, and it was later in life, when he became interested in his family history, that we began to find out about that. So his grandfather came to Exeter, studied for a couple of years, went back, and then had

two sons; Peter's father and Peter's uncle. One went to Harvard Medical School and the other studied medicine at Oxford then went back and opened the first Western-style orthopedic hospital in China.

STULL: And so Mary's relatives were not interested in contributing to the Peter New Award.

MAY: Correct.

STULL: What about Peter's relatives? Are there any that have survived and are identifiable?

MAY: That's one of the things that makes the award such an obsession with me, I suppose; there are no relatives. Peter's closest relative was his cousin, who would have been the son of his uncle, who was a noted physician, who was at Northwestern, and I think he was a pediatrician doing research and was killed in an auto accident at a young age. So, there are no relatives.

STULL: I see.

MAY: The interesting thing, which we're going to put on the Web page, and some other things, is, the compound where--in Shanghai, where Peter's father set up--his father and his brother set up the orthopedic hospital, is still there, and it's listed as a national treasure, because Peter's grandfather, who came to the United States and went back, then arranged for the marriage of the person who would become Madame Chiang Kai-shek, as well as Madame Sun Yat-sen. Madame Chiang Kai-shek was at the hospital in 1937 when the Japanese invaded and took over Shanghai, and that's when they had to leave. So it's a remarkable kind of story that we never really tracked on to until toward the end of his life.

Mary on the other hand, was from very much a working-class family. There was very little interaction or similarity between Mary New's siblings, and Peter and Mary. So, that was an added disappointment on my part.

STULL: You said a moment ago, that the New Award is an obsession for you.

MAY: Yes.

STULL: Why is that? I mean, he wasn't your advisor. I know that you worked for him, but he was not your advisor. So, but obviously developed a very close relationship.

MAY: Yes. Well, I think it's the notion of recognition of debt. You begin to think, within your life, how did I get here from there, and who is responsible, and what took place, and I have such an extraordinary debt to the person, both in terms of what would you say, giving me a wider view of the world, making me more cosmopolitan, so to speak, as well as some of the characteristics. There was a level of tolerance about the man that was very difficult to explain. He was able to listen to people and doing stupid things, and never reprimand them. Going through the boxes of papers, as I'm unpacking them now, his correspondence was just very, very large. He was not a good stylist, he couldn't write very well, but I just had this great sense of debt. And there are things that I could do, because of the position within the society, that, I felt you know, I have to do. And I suppose, I don't know if it's reaching toward the end of your maturity, but you stop and think, there's nothing that I can do to repay, the indignities or whatever, that I forced upon my father-in-law, he's deceased, that he would not be, wherever he is, be happy, if I had a student award in his name. On the other hand, I'm convinced that this is something Peter would appreciate.

STULL: I'm sure.

MAY: So it's, repaying a debt, I suppose you would say. And it's very convenient for me, I mean there's a tax dodge involved, and, where else, at the age of eighty-one, do you get to be in charge of something?

STULL: I don't know.

MAY: Let me, let me deal with a couple of things, because I think, they ought to be put into the framework. I do think--I circle back to this again. I do think that the Tampa and the Santa Fe meetings were critical in getting the SfAA off the ground. I think, being convinced that there were people, such as Sue Ellen, such as Gil Kushner, such as Don Stull, such as Erve Chambers, really convinced me that this is something that could move forward. So, and I was pleased when I went back and looked at the sequencing of events that this began to come together at the time that we were making the critical decisions about the Peter New Award, because in fact, it does seem to gel around those people and around those particular events. So in some ways, you could say the Peter New Award was the first award, but you could also say that the Peter New Award came together at a time when the Society began to see itself as a distinct and unique organization that could house something like this, which makes a lot of sense.

So, the conversation, let's deal with the issue of the separation from the decision not to dissolve the corporate, separate corporate status, and become a part of AAA. One of the things that we're going to want to straighten out is that yes, indeed, this was a critical decision, but what we need as well, is an understanding of how the Society was administered prior to the contract, with the AAA. I can dig up some of that, and I can show the period, for example, when William Foote Whyte had the Society's business affairs at Cornell. I can pull that up, as I say. I think a somewhat separate topic would also review the major characters. I remember thinking at the time, that Ted Downing was in fact the president, and he and I worked quite closely during that year in which we took responsibility from the Bergman people, and I had it down here.

On the other hand, um, I did not feel that Ted had the kind of focus that other of the leaders had. But on the other hand, as I said, the people I mentioned earlier, seem to have the ability to get past the distractions and to think in a longer term, and as I said before, the Santa Fe meeting and the Tampa meeting become the touchstone for me, in thinking to go forward with my involvement in the Peter New thing.

Peter always had a very respectful opinion of Edward Lehman, the Executive Director of the American Anthropological Association. Peter thought he ran things well. I don't know whether Peter New had a strong opinion about separating or not. He always managed to hide anything that was disagreeable. When I went to Washington as treasurer, I would spend a couple hours with Ed Lehman and the staff. We'd have lunch together and then, at the time, it was the outside reviewer for two PhD students at American University, so I could couple the trip with that. So it was not, as I say, a burning thing, but again, it would be very important that we clarify that, and, I know John Young would have a clear sense of it, much more accurate perhaps than I did.

STULL: Well, John and I talked a bit about that--

MAY: --did you--

STULL: --at the, at the last meeting, annual meeting, when I did an oral history with him.

MAY: Good.

STULL: I hope that, that Ted and Sue Ellen have been--I don't know if oral histories have been done with him or not, I need to check with John, to focus on--I don't want

to sound like I'm obsessive about that time, but it seems like this is a time when we-- it's a crucial period in our history and we need to have the perspectives of everyone who brought us through that transition and out the other side, into the successful Society that we've become.

MAY: Well, I absolutely agree, because I think out of that decision, grew the notion of an expanded annual meeting, a kind of a separate and unique identity, and a general sense that, we really are something distinctive.

STULL: You and I have had this discussion often, but we're called, the Society for Applied Anthropology, but we were founded by a broad range of social scientists, not just anthropologists, and anthropology was considered to mean something broader than a discipline, but it concerned with humans. That has been a tension in our society, at least throughout my career, and I know you feel very strongly about SfAA being a broad, ecumenical organization. Would you like to discuss that?

MAY: Yes. That to me, is, something that we, that I could never effectively sell, although I was absolutely convinced that our growth would be limited if we stayed an anthropology association. At times, quite honestly, I would grasp at false data, in order to argue that we're something different than anthropology. So, I tried to look up the, uh, university affiliation of HO authors, *Human Organization* authors, for a couple of years, and when I found what I wanted, I tried to sell that to the board and say see, we're this. I always believed that if we were a single discipline association, our chances for growth would be limited. I felt that, in about from 1993, to about 1998, there were a series of fracturing within professional associations, sometimes on quantitative approaches, others on theoretical ones. For example, a group surfaced that was applied sociology, a group surfaced that was so-called public history, and on and on. I was absolutely convinced that if we found the right title, we could poach on those and we could become the applied social sciences. And that was a pipe dream, that was silly, but it could have been done if one had the resources and the ingenuity, but it never worked. You will remember that when we did the San Antonio meeting, we met jointly with an applied sociology group.

STULL: Um-hm.

MAY: So, that was always in the back of my head and as I said, sometimes I manipulated the data and sometimes I didn't. I have tried to make--again, pushing this particular notion. I've tried to make a big deal out of the two things; the different disciplines that attended the first meeting of the society and the first issues of our

journal. And two, the fact that, I guess the founding godfather, uh, often wrote about the use of anthropology in the title as having a small "A." So, at the first meeting, there were, as I've said, nutritionists, sociologists, geographers, et cetera, et cetera. Now, but again, that's rooted in my obsession with the idea that growth is going to be limited as long as it's identified as a single discipline. And indeed, when I went back and looked at the records, particularly at the Peter New files, I found that one subsequent president complained that we were getting too many, papers submitted by students who were not from departments of anthropology.

STULL: Okay.

MAY: And so, but again as I say, that was a pipe dream. I do remember trying to convince Ted Downing early on, that the name was something we had struggled with, and were there alternatives, and nobody came up with a wonderful term.

STULL: No.

MAY: But perhaps, we're better off the way we were. I don't know that I would have had the ingenuity to try to pull together a disparate discipline that had, as a similarity, an applied or a non-university interest. But it's a lovely thing to dream about.

STULL: Well, it's a tension, as you know, that has gone back and forth.

MAY: Right.

STULL: And it's, I guess, we just have to live with it I suppose.

MAY: Yes. I'm trying to think of it. It will come up in our discussions when, you asked the question, or I raise the comment about how did I relate or not relate, to different leaders. And because, as I've thought about it, and got past the notion of, some were needy and came with the notion that the presidency of SfAA would let them run for president of the triple-A, or some bigger prize. I moved past that and began to think we're all needy and that some, you have to expect this, and that some of them brought, to their responsibility, connections with other associations, that were really quite vital. So, I've become a lot less selfish in thinking about what some of the early leaders wanted and what others wanted.