

Jane Carruthers' Comments on Receiving the Distinguished Scholar Award

Previous recipients of the Distinguished Scholar Award from the American Society for Environmental History have been people who sparked my interest of environmental history from the early 1980s. Over the years, I have been privileged to have met almost all of them, and I am even proud to count some of them among my friends as well as colleagues: Don Worster, Bill Cronon, Jim McCann, Martin Melosi. They, together with other pioneers, like Roderick Nash, John Opie, and Susan Flader, were beacons of the exciting ideas that shaped mine, and enriched my appreciation of an intellectual endeavour of great importance. It was their example that encouraged me to pursue research in this field. As a South African, to have been honoured with this award myself and be among their company, is very unexpected, but very satisfying.

In the academic and political isolation of South Africa in the 1980s, I devoured the books of the prominent US scholars and rejoiced in the arrival of every issue of the journal *Environmental History Review* and then *Environmental History*. At that time, the field was unknown in South Africa and most of my colleagues did not predict a bright future. My stimulation therefore came from the work of scholars abroad. My revisionist history of the Kruger National Park was well received internationally but not at home. Afrikaner historians and members of the public took issue with my interpretation, and I was the object of abusive correspondence and unpleasant criticism in the media. Thankfully, those politics are now in the past.

During those years, however, I was sustained by the international community of environmental history – particularly by the ASEH, that always provided a warm welcome at the convivial annual conferences and gave me a place on the editorial board of the journal and on prize committees. The ASEH, together with colleagues in Australia, Latin America and Europe, afforded opportunities to contribute to the broader international discipline, particularly through the Rachel Carson Center and the International Consortium of Environmental History Organizations.

It is the illustrious distinguished scholars and their inspiration that I thank most for the fact that I have received this award and I am deeply grateful to Graeme Wynn, President of the ASEH, the Society, the Award Committee, and the nominators, for this immense honour and recognition.