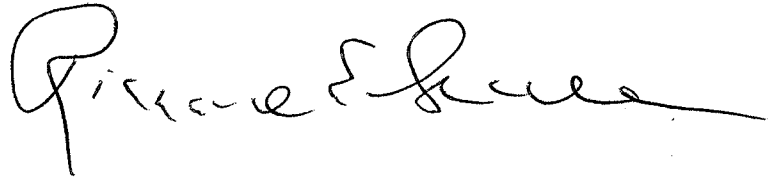


TO: Program Committee
Modern Language Association

FROM: Professor Richard E. Schade
Secretary / Treasurer,
G. E. Lessing Society



DATE: April 2009

SUBJECT: Allied Organization Status Report / G.E. Lessing Society

In accordance with the directive emanating from the Modern Language Society (email of 25 February 2009), the following status report is submitted. The numbered sections below reflect the specifications listed in the email.

- 1) **BRIEF HISTORY:** Since the last review of the status of the G. E. Lessing Society (henceforth LS), the LS has continued its service to the profession unabated. Manifestations of this activity are reflected in active collaboration with the Lessing-Museum-Kamenz (an institution devoted to research into the life, work and times of Lessing [1729-1781]), with the Lessing-Akademie Wolfenbüttel (an institution focusing on research into the greater German Enlightenment), with the Gesellschaft zur Erforschung des 18. Jahrhunderts (the German affiliate of the International Society of 18th-Century Studies), as well as with (most recently) the German Studies Association (a vital venue for the profession in the North America). Concrete evidence of this collaboration is documented in items 3 and 4 below.
- 2) **MLA ACTIVITY:** Over the period encompassed by the review, the G.E. Lessing Society has annually mounted two sessions at the MLA Convention. Importantly, these sessions provided a venue for both junior and senior colleagues on topics particularly pertinent to the purview of the LS and the discipline at large. The presentations at the MLA occasionally result in subsequent publication in the *Lessing Yearbook / Jahrbuch*, making the convention a critical stage in the process of scholarship. At this writing, two sessions have been organized for the 2009 convention in Philadelphia. Historically, attendance at these sessions ranges from 15 to 30 colleagues.

3) **ONGOING ACTIVITY:** Since 2002, the LS has published four volumes of the *Lessing Yearbook / Jahrbuch* under the Managing Editorship of Richard E. Schade (Cincinnati) with Herbert W. Rowland (Purdue) as Assistant and Book Review Editor. Each article is juried:

- > *Lessing Yearbook / Jahrbuch* XXXIV (2002). 258 pp.
10 articles / 26 book reviews
- > *Lessing Yearbook / Jahrbuch* XXXV (2003). 360 pp.
11 articles / 17 book reviews
- > *Lessing Yearbook / Jahrbuch* XXXVI (2004 / 2005). 284 pp.
10 articles / 39 book reviews
- > *Lessing Yearbook / Jahrbuch* XXXVII (2006 / 2007). 220 pp.
12 articles / 26 book reviews

Volume XXXVII prints the juried proceedings of the 2007 Tuscon international Lessing Conference, an event supported by the German NEH equivalent, the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*.

A separate proceedings volume documenting a conference held in Kamenz and Weimar in cooperation with the Lessing Museum (and with the financial support of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*), appeared in 2004:

- > Albrecht / Schade, co-editors, *Mit Lessing zur Moderne. Soziokulturelle Wirkungen des Aufklärers um 1900* (Kamenz: Lessing Museum 2004). 255 pp. 17 articles

In short, then, the Lessing Society has been the venue for the publication of 1377 pp. of scholarship in 60 articles and 108 book reviews. A copy of each table of contents (*Inhalt*) is included.

Currently, *Lessing Yearbook / Jahrbuch* XXXVIII (2007 / 2009) – with 13 articles accepted -- is in preparation for submission to the publisher, Wallstein Verlag.

In addition to this record of book-length publication, the LS offices at the Department of German Studies, University of Cincinnati, publishes a semi-annual, 4-page newsletter, *Notes & Notices*, a venue for calls for papers, dues reminders and other information pertinent to the membership.

- 4) **MEMBERSHIP ACTIVITY:** Annually, members of the LS participate in the organization of and involvement in the MLA sessions, i.e. 8 persons annually. Additionally, 38 members presented their work in the two conferences documented above in item 3, the Kamenz / Weimar and the Tucson conferences. The 108 book reviews published in the *Lessing Yearbook / Jahrbuch* are the work of LS members and the members are frequently called upon to serve as jurors of submissions to the *Lessing Yearbook / Jahrbuch*. Finally, the governance structure of the LS, a five-member Executive Committee (currently: Monika Fick, Aachen [President], Barbara Fischer, Alabama [Vice President], Steven Martinson, Tucson [Immediate past President], Richard E. Schade, Cincinnati [Secretary / Treasurer], Herbert Rowland, Purdue [Assistant & Book Review Editor]) selflessly give of their time and energy.
- 5) **PURPOSE AND DATE:** The LS, a learned society dedicated to research into the life, writings and era defined by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-81), was founded in the Department of Germanic Languages & Literatures, University of Cincinnati, in 1966. Its founders, Professors Gottfried F. Merkel and Guy Stern, were and are themselves connected to Lessing in spirit. Merkel studied at the University of Leipzig, Germany, as did young Lessing. Stern, a distinguished Germanist of Jewish heritage, was inspired to honor Lessing, the advocate of religious tolerance. Both understood that Cincinnati's graduate program (founded in 1900) would be enhanced by its linkage to a worldwide community of scholars of the German Enlightenment.

The works of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing – dramas, journalistic pieces, theoretical writings on aesthetics, critical writings on varied topics, poetic theory, and issues of religion – are not necessarily well known to the international community of scholars. The central purpose of the LS is to counter this deficit, for “the German Voltaire” contributed to the progressive intellectual projects of singular importance for the formation of the modern world-view. He questioned the authorities and orthodoxies of his times, defining enlightenment as a never-ending intellectual process rather than a state that necessarily can be attained – a perspective he shares with his contemporary Immanuel Kant. Through its yearbook, the LS seeks to ‘enlighten,’ inform and further the study of the “Age of Lessing,” approximately 1700 to 1780.

- 6) **CONSTITUTION**: See Enclosed.
- 7) **MEMBERSHIP**: Current Membership is 280 dues-paying members, of which 1/3 are non-USA. This number has held steady for the past decade, but it is down from an historical high in 1980 – a time coming off of two Lessing commemorations – 1976 / 250th birth and 1981 / 200th death. The decline in membership also reflects the general trend in German Studies, i.e. college and university, undergraduate and graduate curricula focus less on the 18th century than in times past. – Membership application enclosed.
- 8) **DUES STRUCTURE**: See Enclosed.