



IN MEMORIAM

The GSA extends its condolences to the family and friends of all the scholars mentioned here. Please note that roundtable discussions and celebrations of the lives and works of Katherine Aaslestad and Peter Reill will be held in Indianapolis.

Peter Reill (1938-2019)

The German Studies Association was saddened to learn of the death of Peter Hanns Reill in the wee hours of the morning on August 19, 2019. We, his family -- Jenna M. Gibbs and Dominique Kirchner Reill -- do not commemorate his death on that day, however. We take time to tell stories, mourn, and make his favorite carbonara recipe on August 18, the last day he lived. August 18, 2019 was a good day. We remember Peter enjoying his Sunday routines with Jenna: sleeping in, reading the newspaper cover-to-cover, and listening to classical music while he tinkered in the kitchen. We recall how excited he was to visit Dominique's apartment so we could pop open a bottle of bubbly to celebrate the arrival of her first reader's report for her next book. In between congratulations, he also took impish joy in teasing her for spoiling her cats. We then went out for a fancy lunch; he really enjoyed nice restaurants. Afterwards the three of us took a short walk on the beach. When Peter and Jenna got home, they spent a leisurely evening in their living room surrounded by his favorite books, talking about their plans for the year to come. The last day of Peter Reill's life was filled with love, surrounded by all the things he cared most about: his family, beauty, music, and books.

Peter was not born to have the life he had; he fought tooth and nail for it. Born in 1938 to immigrant German parents with almost no money but a healthy work ethic, he grew up in a New York City where opportunities were few and WWII-anger against Germany was much. He was always recognized as smart and graduated from Brooklyn Technical High School and then NYU. Like so many his age, he dreamed of being an engineer and building a spaceship that could leave Sputnik's fame in the dust. Instead, he flunked out of that dream and found a deeper passion, for something that became his lifelong vocation: history. His talent in thinking historically was significant enough for his undergraduate professor to travel out to Queens to convince his widowed mother to let her boy go, to let him accept the full fellowship to the graduate program at Northwestern University in faraway Illinois. His talent and hard work were also significant enough that he got his first and most beloved job at UCLA in 1966, before even finishing his dissertation. From there he set out on a path that would produce some of the most important work on the Enlightenment and German eighteenth-century history.

Talking about Peter's publications and professional activities is to talk about him. He loved his work, though he often fretted about how to get it just right. The care he took is obvious to all who have had the good fortune to read his two books, his many edited volumes, and his astounding number of articles. His first monograph, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (1975), was a brilliant investigation of the fertile interplay of historical thinking, scientific ideas, and late Enlightenment culture. It established him as a leading historian of the *Aufklärung*, a reputation he cemented with a string of publications in the 1990s: *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* (1996), *Visions of Empire: Voyages, Botany, and Representations of Nature* (1996), and *Wissenschaft als kulturelle Praxis, 1750–1900* (1999). In 2001, together with his friend Keith Baker, Peter edited *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question*, which was a seminal attempt to reconcile the supposed opposition of the Enlightenment and postmodernity. Peter's second monograph, *Vitalizing Nature in the Enlightenment* (2005), built on his earlier work but added a new focus on the vitalist impulses of late Enlightenment thinkers. Using, among others, Buffon, Wilhelm and Alexander von Humboldt, Torbern Olof Bergman, and Lorenz Oken as his guides, he charted fascinating constellations of the unique ways late eighteenth-century thinkers viewed nature, which he described under the heading "Enlightenment Vitalism." In so doing, he challenged the common distinction made between Enlightenment thought and Romantic Naturphilosophie. According to Peter, vitalism was neither Naturphilosophie's predecessor nor was it a manifestation of counter-Enlightenment.

Taken together, Peter's scholarship has fundamentally altered how the Enlightenment is understood. His work is destined to have a lasting impact on eighteenth-century studies and, indeed, on the practice of intellectual history in general. And yet he will be missed in the world of history for another reason, too: he created social space for the exchange of ideas and the support of promising new scholars. Most famous of his initiatives was his twenty-year directorship from 1991 to 2011 of the Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies and the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library. At the Clark he hosted numerous innovative conferences and founded fellowship programs and a chamber music series that together have changed the cultural face of his beloved adopted city, Los Angeles. His chairship of the UCLA History Department saw the hiring of some of the department's greatest stars, including Ivan Berend who would grow to become one of Peter's closest friends. His presidency of the International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies coaligned with the 2003 conference held in Los Angeles, where participants were awed by Peter's ability to get the Getty Museum to open its doors only to them and for a movie theater to play the silent film version of *Casanova* with live musical accompaniment. In Germany, Peter had a decades-long collaboration with Rudolf Vierhaus and the entire Max-Planck-Institut für Geschichte community in Göttingen, as well as with the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin. He also served as one of the earliest presidents of the precursor of the German Studies Association and worked hard throughout his life to bolster the study of all things related to German language and history within the United States and beyond.

It's been two years since his death and the fact that it has taken so long to publish this memorial in the GSA's newsletter doesn't speak to how Peter has been forgotten. It speaks to how truly terrible these last two years have been and how hard it is to admit that he is gone. The only comfort to be had is that his work lives on, with a new edition of his first book just out, some upcoming conference panels dedicated to recognizing his influence in the field (including a roundtable in Indianapolis at the GSA conference), and articles forthcoming on the project to which he dedicated the last years of his life. These are things that would make him proud and we are happy to think of that. We miss him. We love him. And we hope his historical community follows his family's practice of remembering his life more than his death.

Jenna M. Gibbs, Florida International University
Dominique Kirchner Reill, University of Miami



Christian Søm (1936-2021)

Christian Søm was a long-time member of the GSA from its "founding generation." He participated in the second annual conference in 1977 (with 50 scholars in attendance) and from then on was a regular participant and committee member until his retirement. His [obituary](#) was written by his colleague in the California State University, Long Beach's Department of Political Science Ron Schmidt, and is reproduced here with permission.