

Raymond Grew 1930–2020

We announce with sorrow the death of Raymond Grew, editor of this journal, member of its Editorial Committee and president of the Board, for more than half a century of service to *CSSH*.

CSSH was blessed to have two brilliant editors at the outset: its founder, Sylvia L. Thrupp, for fifteen years (1958–1973), followed by the generation-long editorship of Ray Grew, for twenty-four years (1973–1997).

The conjuncture of these two was not accidental. In his telling, Ray had become aware of *CSSH* in its first year, learning that it was controversial, and the promising creation of a remarkable scholar. Soon after, Sylvia Thrupp brought *CSSH* to Michigan from the University of Chicago. When Ray joined the Michigan faculty, from Princeton, the presence of *CSSH*, “already well known and widely circulated,” was one of the attractions. Sylvia appointed Ray’s wife, Daphne Grew, as manuscript editor. She worked from a second desk crowded into Sylvia’s small History Department office, which at that time was the journal’s world headquarters. (After many years at *CSSH* Daphne continued elsewhere on a life-long career as an editor.) As Ray said, Sylvia invited him to join the Editorial Committee, “largely I suspected on the grounds that I had married well.” (I draw here upon Ray’s excellent history of the first fifty years in *CSSH* 50, 1, which I commend to readers of this memorial: <https://cssh.lsa.umich.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/CSSH-On-the-Society-and-History-of-CSSH-Grew.pdf>).

This trio of friends, augmented by Michigan colleagues congenial to the boldness of the enterprise, such as Eric Wolf and Aram Yengoyan, combined to nourish and grow what was a fragile thing. The project of *CSSH* from the start was to draw a readership of historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and others minded to read on regions and topics not their own, seeking new conceptual and analytic tools for application to the places and themes of their special attention, from work that was empirically grounded and conceptually innovative. The new readership, imagined into existence, needed writing differently framed from that of the specialist journals, speaking, rather, to readers most of whom were outside the writer’s specialty.

This readership and those who wrote the articles did not form a membership organization. The leadership of the journal was localized in Ann Arbor, on the campus of the University of Michigan, and enjoyed elements



FIGURE 1. Photo by Sarah Grew.

of support from the University but did not belong to it. The Editorial Committee advised the editor but was not a decision-making body. All of these conditions still hold true at *CSSH* today, in its sixty-third year. Lacking a membership who can make demands on its journal; without belonging to a university overseeing its operation; without an editorial collective making decisions that may pull to the middle; without all these, the *CSSH* editor is exceptionally free to act and take chances, and the reputation of the journal is exceptionally dependent upon the talent of the persons who become its editor.

Raymond Grew brought many skills to his editorship, above all the essential one for an enterprise of comparison, a wide-ranging curiosity about the world and the problems of representing it truly. This is admirably shown in a fine pair of essays, “The Case for Comparing Histories,” and his reassessment of it, “On Rereading an Earlier Essay,” in the volume *Modes of Comparison: Theory and Practice* (Aram A. Yengoyan, ed., University of Michigan Press, 2006; https://www.press.umich.edu/142174/modes_of_comparison), dedicated to Ray “for his forty years of inspiration and guidance” with *CSSH*.

Beyond this job requirement, the quality that stands out for me is Ray’s writing, and how like it was to his speech, bright, varied, modulated, built with freshly conceived images, free of cliché, and playful (a word he often used to praise another’s writing). An example: “To those who have lost faith in progress, Marxism, modernization, or modernity, sober calls for historical comparison can seem awfully old fashioned, a gratuitous insistence on older forms, like polished silver at a picnic” (op. cit., 122).

The saying, “You meet him in his work” is true of Ray, and though his speech is now stilled, his work remains, and in it we meet the man, and his voice. Work in this case is loaded with meaning. His father was a writer, and one for whom “work” and “write” were synonyms. Ray told me that his father would phone and ask him about his work, and if Ray told him about a seminar he had presided over, or a lecture he had delivered, his father would say, “No, but what about your work?”—meaning, what have you been writing?

Once upon a time, not so long ago although it seems a different era, I would wander into the reading room of some department of history, or sociology, or anthropology in some country, and there I would find a copy of *CSSH* among the most recent journals on the table in the middle of the room. It stood out from the rest because its cover was printed in a shade of green found nowhere in nature. Members of the department would go into the reading room, perhaps once a week, to catch up on the latest stuff. If they opened issues of *CSSH* during the Grew years, they would meet the man, and the voice.

In the age of library subscriptions to digital versions it is not so easy to find Ray in the back issues. If you are so fortunate as to have shelves of *CSSH* at home, as I do, you can pull an issue of the Grew years at random and hear Ray speaking to you in the Editorial Foreword, identifying the delights of an article you are about to read, and the unexpected relations it has with other *CSSH* articles. When I did this just recently, I found him drawing me into a fine article on phrenology in nineteenth-century France, in which it served not as pseudo-science but as a stepping-stone to social science (Angus McLaren, “A Prehistory of the Social Sciences: Phrenology in France,” *CSSH* 23, 1).

If you haven’t had the pleasure of meeting Ray, it is not too late.

You can meet him in his work.

————Thomas R. Trautmann