

Who Tells Your Story: Contested History at the NAM

JENNIFER DELTON

From 1948 to 1960, an executive secretary at the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) attempted to persuade NAM leaders to commission an “objective” history of the organization. The project never came to fruition, but the story reveals a fundamental split within the NAM between its professional staff and its conservative leadership over the organization’s mission. It thus offers a unique perspective on the NAM not as a powerful lobby, but as a contested workplace with its own fraught dynamics, which, in turn, reveals a more progressive image of the 1950s-era NAM than historians have typically recognized.

In 1948, an executive secretary at the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) named Vada Horsch got it into her head that what the NAM really needed was an “objective” history of itself to show its many naysayers and critics all the good work the NAM had done. The media, she complained, only emphasized the NAM’s negative aspects, its union-busting and lobbying, rather than its support of international trade and safety standards. Nor did NAM leaders help the situation with their “free enterprise” campaigns and narrow conservatism. Somehow she was able to gain the NAM board’s authorization to collect materials and even enlist a historian to write this history. Horsch and the historian worked on the project for more than a decade. And then it all fell apart. By 1960, the historian was threatening to sue the NAM, and the executive committee pulled the plug, declaring the entire project “infeasible.” All that is left of that particular noble dream

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is stuffed into box 43 of the NAM archives, which Vada Horsch had so meticulously reorganized as part of the project.

It is a weird little story that not only raises questions about the nature of business history, but also, more significantly, offers us a glimpse into the inner workings of a major industrial lobby. Historians and political scientists have studied organizations like the NAM mostly in terms of their function as lobbyists, which is to say, their effect on political processes or their role in major contests over labor, trade, and political economy.¹ These studies see the NAM in terms of its leaders and member companies, that is, “industry,” which makes sense, given their objectives. But it means they have generally ignored the people who ran the day-to-day business of the association, some of whom were women. Vada Horsch was a staff member, not a factory owner or NAM member. Horsch and other staff members helped NAM leaders formulate policy and promote international trade, while also encouraging member companies to innovate, improve employee relations, and comply with regulations. As such, the staff had a moderating effect on a largely conservative organization. This was not lost on some of the more conservative NAM leaders, who were suspicious of the staff’s liberal tendencies.

Like all struggles over history, this one was about whose story would get told. In this context, Horsch’s pursuit of an “objective” history can be seen as an attempt to validate the type of work she and her coworkers did for the NAM, which, as it turns out, was closely aligned to a progressive sensibility rarely ascribed to the NAM of the 1950s. While Horsch was a professional woman in a workplace dominated by men, gender was not her concern, nor did it determine the outcome of the story. Nonetheless, gender seems to hover around the story’s edges, both in terms of how Horsch pursued her objective and in the historical circumstances that led the NAM to hire women in the first place. For all its loudly worn conservatism, the NAM was a modernizer, and Vada Horsch, for one, wanted people to know it.

The NAM’s Organizational Structure

Founded in 1895 to promote foreign trade, the NAM became the foremost U.S. industrial lobbyist in the twentieth century, known especially for its vehement anti-unionism. In the 1950s, it consisted of

1. In the twentieth century, political scientists used the NAM as the prototypical “interest group” in many studies; see, e.g., Schattschneider, *Politics, Pressure and the Tariff*; Bauer, de Sola Pool, and Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy*; more recently, see Waterhouse, *Lobbying America*; Martin and Swank, *The Political Construction of Business Interests*. Labor historians have tracked the NAM’s battles against unions; see Greene, *Pure and Simple Politics*; Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise*; Harris, *The Right to Manage*.

20,000 dues-paying member companies and was governed by a board of directors made up of representatives from member companies. The board of directors elected its governing officers, including a president and a vice president from each state; these officers in turn also sat on the board, which numbered 170.² Policy committees on such topics as conservation, taxation, patents, and international relations allowed members with particular interests or expertise to formulate policy recommendations, which were then submitted for final approval by the board of directors.³ There was also an executive committee that controlled the purse strings, but whose decisions likewise had to be approved by the board. NAM presidents, officers, and board members were unsalaried business executives who remained employed in their own companies.

Managing the day-to-day business of the organization was a staff of 400, based mostly in New York City and Washington, DC. NAM staff conducted research for committees, recruited and managed members, produced publications and television/radio shows, provided legal services, organized educational workshops, and held conferences to promote international trade. A large part of the NAM's work was dedicated to providing its members with information and services known today as "best practices" in areas such as foreign trade, industrial safety, employee benefits, and government regulations. Through this work, NAM staff imparted the kind of long-term developmental outlook associated with large corporations to its members, the majority of which were small firms.⁴ The staff also helped member companies comply with new regulations, many of which the NAM had strenuously opposed.

The staff had its own hierarchy. At the top were executive vice presidents, a general secretary, and heads of different departments and divisions, such as legal, membership, industrial relations, public relations, and the like. Within those departments, there were researchers, supervisors, secretaries, and clerks.⁵ Whereas NAM leaders' positions were unsalaried and temporary, the senior staff had the advantage of long tenure and institutional memory, which gave them a great deal of influence.

2. NAM, *1956 Annual Report*.

3. *Ibid.*

4. On corporations' developmental outlook, see Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of Capitalism*, 27; Berk, *Louis D. Brandeis*, chaps. 6, 7. Eighty-five percent of NAM membership were small concerns of fewer than five hundred employees.

5. Positions and departments changed over the time period I am focusing on, but the information can be found in various staff officer lists found in NAM Records, Series 1, box 44.

In contrast to NAM leaders, who had typically worked their way up a company's hierarchy (or taken over a family business), the senior staff were college-educated professionals, who tended to hold the views of the corporate liberal order that dominated the U.S. political economy in the post-World War II era. This meant, among other things, that they appreciated the economic efficiency of large organizations, valued cooperation over competition, favored freer trade, and accepted the role unions and the state played in a modern industrial economy.⁶ This view was in sharp contrast to that held by many NAM leaders and also conflicts with how historians have generally characterized the NAM—which is as a conservative holdout to the post-World War II corporate liberal consensus.⁷

Evidence that the staff was somewhat less conservative than NAM membership can be found in a 1954 survey conducted by a management consulting firm to ascertain what today would be called the “workplace climate.” Whereas 84 percent of NAM members said that they usually agreed with NAM's positions on national affairs, only 63 percent of the staff agreed.⁸ The very fact the survey included questions about the staff's views on NAM's mission indicates some tension. The survey also revealed that NAM staff had less confidence than its membership in how effective the NAM was in carrying out its mission. Fully half the New York City office staff felt the public regarded the NAM with disfavor.⁹ And not without reason.

The NAM's Problem

The NAM had an image problem. It had begun in the early twentieth century, when the association became a predominantly anti-labor organization, locked in battle against the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and allegedly involved in bribing and intimidating U.S. lawmakers. A congressional investigation of U.S. lobbying in 1913

6. On the corporate liberal order in the post-World War II United States, also called the “liberal consensus” or the “corporate commonwealth,” see McQuaid, *Uneasy Partners*, 19–35; Hodgson, *America in Our Time*, chaps. 4–6; Griffith, “Dwight D. Eisenhower and the Corporate Commonwealth,” throughout.

7. This conception of NAM as conservative vis-à-vis corporate liberals is articulated most succinctly by McQuaid, *Uneasy Partners*, chap. 1; Harris, *The Right to Manage*, chaps. 2–4. See also Ferguson, “Industrial Conflict,” 7–10.

8. Opinion Research Corporation, “Staff Members Talk About NAM,” September 14, 1954, p. 60, NAM Records, Series 8, box 148. In terms of trade, political scientists Bauer, de Sola Pool, and Dexter, *American Business and Public Policy*, 135, noted that the NAM staff was “almost to a man in favor of a liberal trade policy,” whereas NAM leadership was divided on the issue. This is one of the few mentions of the staff in the academic literature.

9. *Ibid.*, 48–49

focused almost solely on the NAM.¹⁰ Then, in the throes of the Great Depression, the NAM denounced the New Deal, actively resisted the union-protecting Wagner Act (1935), and launched an immense propaganda campaign against New Deal “socialism.”¹¹ *Fortune* magazine wrote of these years: “All industry has suffered from N.A.M.’s maladroit presentation of industry’s case.”¹²

During World War II, NAM leaders tried to rehabilitate their reputation, working with the government for victory and even participating in labor-management conferences (although many of its leaders still refused to recognize labor’s right to organize). After the war, the NAM leadership announced that it would take a more positive approach, emphasizing what it stood *for*, rather than what it was against.¹³ But despite these efforts, the bad press just kept coming. In 1948, the *Harvard Business Review* featured an article that questioned whether the NAM could rightly call itself a “spokesman for industry.” The author argued that the NAM was run by a small group of conservatives who ignored its members’ interests. Its objectives were narrow and self-interested, and it failed to provide the type of progressive, forward-looking leadership industry needed.¹⁴ *Time* magazine reported on the article as if it were news, giving it even wider publicity.¹⁵ In 1953, the title of an article in the *Journal of Politics* asked: “NAM: Influential Lobby or Kiss of Death?” The author thought the latter.¹⁶

NAM leaders saw the problem as a failure “to get their message across,” which unfortunately led them to redouble their public relations campaigns on behalf of “free enterprise.”¹⁷ They believed the American public was being misled by a liberal media, the labor movement, and especially academia. If only the public could hear the “other side of the story,” the NAM’s activities would be vindicated. As most commentators understood, however, “the other side of the story” was an ideologically conservative attack on the “socialistic” premises of the New Deal order, which American society and even most major corporations had largely accepted. The NAM’s constant campaigns on behalf of free enterprise and individualism were seen as propaganda and only exacerbated

10. Schriftgiesser, *The Lobbyists*, 40–41; Steigerwalt, “The NAM and the Congressional Investigations of 1913.”

11. Burch, “The NAM as an Interest Group”; Tedlow, “The National Association of Manufacturers and Public Relations.”

12. “Renovation in the NAM,” quote on p. 72.

13. Workman, “Manufacturing Power”; “Renovation in the NAM.”

14. Cleveland, “NAM: Spokesman for Industry?”

15. “Target: N.A.M.” *Time*, May 31, 1948, p. 84. There are two full files of correspondence about this article, see “Albert Cleveland” files, NAM Records, Series 12, box 192.

16. Gable, “NAM: Influential Lobby or Kiss of Death?,” 254.

17. On which, see Fones-Wolf, *Selling Free Enterprise*, throughout.

the NAM's public relations problem. The more NAM tried to put out its story, the worse its reputation became. Critics delighted in citing how much money NAM spent on public relations (almost \$4 million in 1945!). *Fortune* published a scathing critique of the ridiculousness of all "free enterprise" campaigns.¹⁸ NAM leaders remained unaware of the inadequacies of their "public relations" efforts, but individuals within the NAM were beginning to think that there might be a better way to correct, or at least balance, people's impression of the organization.

Vada Horsch's Solution

Vada Horsch came to the NAM in 1932 as an administrative assistant to the general secretary. She had graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a degree in history. In addition to the position for which she was originally hired, she also served as secretary for various committees, before being promoted to assistant secretary of the NAM in 1947. This was a professional position. She was not a girl in the steno pool. She worked closely with the executive committee, board of directors, and myriad outside international committees. Horsch occupied this position until her retirement in 1966.¹⁹

Horsch's main interests were in international trade and industrial relations—two areas the more protectionist, conservative NAM leaders regarded with suspicion. She headed the NAM's International Economic Affairs Department and worked with her counterparts in Europe and Latin America to develop trade and encourage intercultural understanding—winning awards from both the French and Italian governments for her work. She held a leadership role in the U.S. Inter-American Council and helped get the NAM a consultative position on the UN's Economic and Social Committee. Supported by the NAM's large multinational members, this part of the NAM was almost Wilsonian in its belief that U.S. prosperity and world peace depended on the free and open exchange of goods and that the U.S. government had a positive role to play in building good trade relations.

Horsch also led the Industrial Relations Institute, which held seminars to educate members in the latest professional management techniques. While NAM conservatives celebrated individualism, the NAM's Industrial Relations Institute embraced the group-based "human relations" approach to labor relations, which emphasized social responsibility, teamwork, and cooperation. True, the purpose of such managerial techniques was in part to discourage unionization, but such

18. Whyte et al., *Is Anybody Listening?*

19. "Of Those Who Served," 1954, which contains biographies of NAM staff, as found in NAM Records, Series 1, box 101.



Figure 1 Vada Horsch, 1958, receiving the French Legion Medal of Honor.

Sources: copyright National Association of Manufacturers, courtesy of Hagley Museum and Library.

Citation: In NAM Photo and AV Collection, box 31, f 34, Hagley Museum and Library, Wilmington, Delaware.

techniques also endorsed high wages, health benefits, employment stability, and worker satisfaction—progressive policies that were generally beneficial to the average employee.²⁰

20. On the “pros” of human relations, see Chase, *The Proper Study of Mankind*; Whyte, “Human Relations Theory; on the “cons,” see Jacoby, *Modern Manors*; Bell, “Adjusting Men to Machines”; Harris, *The Right to Manage*, chap. 1.

Like the rest of the NAM, Vada Horsch was outraged by the bad press NAM attracted. But her solution was not to rehash tired arguments about “free enterprise” and “government encroachment.” Rather, she sought to emphasize the positive contributions the NAM had made in the areas of international cooperation and industrial relations. After the *Harvard Business Review’s* harsh critique (described earlier), Horsch wrote her boss, NAM Secretary Noel Sargent: “I think it is ... too bad that the Harvard Business Review does not know that the NAM is one of two U.S. organizations having consultative status with the ESOC [the UN Economic and Social Council].” Her sharply worded memo listed twelve other achievements not mentioned in the article, including the establishment of the Industrial Relations Institute, work on employment stabilization, participation in a wartime industry–labor conference, and support for the United Nations. She concluded by suggesting that more of “this type of information” be assembled to “be used in rebuttal against such attacks as made in the Harvard Business Review.”²¹ Horsch had long been collecting and publicizing “this type of information” concerning the NAM’s work, which happened to be the aspects in which she was most involved. Noel Sargent sent Horsch’s critique of the article to selected NAM members, one of whom wrote to Horsch, “It’s too bad that you can’t speak more often for the Association.”²² Horsch must have shared that sentiment. Increasingly, it seemed, the organization was emphasizing not the positive contributions of NAM staff, but the ideological agenda of its leaders. During the 1950s, NAM’s executive committee became more conservative and more insular. Three of its members—Cola Parker, William Grede, and Ernie Swigert—would become founding members of the John Birch Society in 1958.²³ Fans of Friedrich Hayek and active in conservative organizations like the Foundation for Economic Education, they saw the NAM as the last line of defense against the “socialization” of America. They believed unions were illegal monopolies. They suspected President Eisenhower of being part of an internationalist cabal. Their extreme ideological conservatism was at odds with the developmental work that Horsch wanted to emphasize. Indeed, they often complained about the liberal views of the staff and regularly attacked the international affairs committee.²⁴ At the

21. Vada Horsch to Mr. Sargent, March 16, 1948, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

22. Stinnet to Horsch, June 28, 1948, NAM Records, Series 12, box 192.

23. On NAM conservatives, see Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands*, esp. 13–15.

24. On complaints about liberal staff, see specifically June 16, 1955, and December 2, 1957 in the Minutes of the Executive Committee, NAM Records, Series 13, box 251. The tariff issue may have played a role in the executive committee’s 1958 decision to discontinue the international affairs committee. See Minutes of the Executive Committee, September 18, 1957, NAM Records, Series 13, box 251.

rate the executive committee was going, there would be little left of the “type of information” that Horsch thought could salvage the NAM’s reputation with the public. It is small wonder, then, that she leapt at the chance to compile a history of the NAM.

The History Project

Vada Horsch and Noel Sargent were the NAM’s in-house historians. They fielded questions about past policies and achievements and provided information to researchers (mostly Vassar and Mount Holyoke students). The need for something more became apparent in 1944, when the planners of the association’s fiftieth anniversary celebration realized there was no official history of the association. With only a year before the big event, they considered commissioning someone to accomplish this task. The planners seemed aware that they were unlikely to secure a historian with a national reputation (although they did consider Charles Beard) and that their best hope was a “competent writer.”²⁵ These plans came to naught, however, and the planners turned to Horsch’s “lists of achievements” to throw together a commemorative booklet. Shortly thereafter, James Emery, former legal counsel for the NAM, began investigating the NAM’s early history, in which he had played a large role. Emery was then a member of the Old Timers Council, which consisted of retired NAM leaders who got together every year.

In 1948, the Old Timers Council proposed that the NAM commission a history of the association. Board chairman Earl Bunting presented their proposal to the executive committee. The committee agreed to “appoint a special committee to consider and consult with Association officers as to the development of a complete history of the NAM, in which the Association activities would be related to contemporary public conditions and thinking.”²⁶ It also authorized the staff to begin collecting material for such a history, a task given to Vada Horsch.²⁷

Despite her many responsibilities at the NAM, Vada Horsch threw herself into collecting materials, visiting archives, interviewing the Old Timers, and moving the project along. Having approved the proposal,

25. Gebhart to Finger, June 15, 1944; Finger to Weisenberger, July 5, 1944; NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

26. Quoted in a memo from Vada Horsch to Lambert Miller, February 25, 1960, in which Horsch provided a time line to the NAM’s general counsel of the “History Project.” NAM Records, Series 1, box 42.

27. Vada Horsch to Mr. Sargent, December 17, 1948, confirming her understanding of her new responsibilities with regard to the history project, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

the executive committee took its time appointing a committee (eleven years). But Vada Horsch moved swiftly ahead. The first thing she did was establish her authority to do so. She sent a detailed memo to Noel Sargent, her immediate boss, board chair Earl Bunting, and two of the Old Timers she would be working with, making sure they understood that she understood that she had been put in charge of directing, organizing, reviewing, and assisting in the interpretation of “the history project.”²⁸ She made it clear that she knew what a proper history looked like, that it was based on a wide variety of perspectives, drawn from different archival sources. This was not just about confirming her qualifications but also, more strategically, it was her attempt to shape this project into a proper, “objective,” history not just another public relations gambit. For her, *objectivity* meant a well-documented story set in the context of industrialization and American economic development, a neutral recording of “facts,” devoid of both the media’s anti-NAM bias and the NAM’s pro-business propaganda. Because NAM leaders complained so much about liberal bias, objectivity was also a rhetorical tactic to persuade them of the value of a real history. Accordingly, she laid out a very ambitious strategy that listed sources to be consulted both inside the NAM (minutes, proceedings, and publications) and outside (congressional hearings, AFL proceedings, newspapers, and economic history). Just two months after she had been enlisted she already had hired two people to help organize materials.

By 1951, she had written a sixteen-page history of the organization, called “The NAM Past and Present,” which she used to orientate newly hired NAM staff (another of her job responsibilities). This document reflected Horsch’s own interests and perspective. In discussing the NAM’s origins in 1895, she asserted that expansion of foreign trade was the primary purpose of the new organization. It was also concerned with such issues as freight rates and tariffs, but these were of secondary importance. When she finally turned to the NAM’s anti-labor activities, she called them a “major departure,” adding: “most people believe that the NAM was formed as an organization to fight labor. Nothing could be further from the truth.”²⁹ She acknowledged that during “the next ten years” (1903–1913) the NAM had focused on labor relations and that the NAM presidents “of those days” (as if this were all in the past) “engaged in bitter controversies to uphold the principles of the open shop.” Having dispensed that issue, she listed the NAM’s positive achievements in industrial relations,

28. Vada Horsch to Mr. Sargent, December 17, 1948, box 43.

29. Vada Horsch, “The NAM Past and Present,” September 4, 1951, rev. ed. June 10, 1963, quote on p. 4. Document in NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

accident prevention, and workmen's compensation. A remarkable NAM emerges from this history, one that fought child labor, supported workmen's compensation, held international conferences, supported the United Nations, and worked with the government to expand trade. It is not that this was wrong—the NAM did indeed do those things—it was just not a part of the NAM that its leaders usually acknowledged. Despite this discrepancy, or quite possibly because of it, general secretary Noel Sargent loved it. He wrote to Bunting that though it would take some time to commission and create a “real” history, the history that Miss Horsch had prepared for new employees' orientation could serve the association in the meantime.³⁰

Horsch's work on the “history project” was aided and abetted by Albert Steigerwalt, a history graduate student who was beginning his dissertation research on the NAM in 1949. Horsch helped him identify and locate materials. She set up interviews for him with the Old Timers. She also alerted her superiors to his work, which led to an arrangement whereby Steigerwalt would make available his research and dissertation to the NAM and NAM, in turn, would pay his travel and research expenses, via a grant to the University of Michigan. As Horsch wrote to NAM board chairman Earl Bunting, “I think we are very fortunate in having this arrangement ... as the work he is doing would probably have involved at least a year or so of our time.” She assured Bunting that a thorough background check had been done on Steigerwalt, adding, “I do not expect that Mr. Steigerwalt in his thesis will suppress any information on the Association but he has a free enterprise mind.”³¹

Albert Steigerwalt must have appeared as a ray of sunlight to Vada Horsch, so in line was their thinking on both the NAM and history. He too understood that the NAM was a lightning rod for controversy and thus unfairly caricatured in the press and by the intellectual classes. He too understood that the NAM's work went far beyond opposing labor and the New Deal and included many positive contributions to international trade, industrial relations, and business in general. He too believed that the best response to attacks on NAM was an “objective” appraisal of the organization's history, the good and the bad. At a time when it seemed as though the NAM leadership had

30. Noel Sargent to Earl Bunting, September 26, 1951, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

31. Horsch to Earl Bunting, July 20, 1949, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43. The NAM eventually paid him \$788.60. See Sargent to Miller, August 6, 1949, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43. A revision of this dissertation was eventually published as *The National Association of Manufacturers: A Study in Business Leadership* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1964). It is the only book-length history of the NAM (although it ends in 1914).

all but forgotten its intention to develop a history, at a time when Vada Horsch seemed to be the only one rolling that ball forward, Albert Steigerwalt endorsed her view about the urgency of a “real” history and began plotting with her how to make this happen.

In October 1955, Horsch visited Steigerwalt, now an assistant professor of business history at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Steigerwalt had very definite ideas about what the history of the NAM should look like, beginning with a complete survey of all the NAM’s files and records. As he wrote to Horsch, “The success of the N.A.M. history project rests upon a very thorough records inventory,” that included not only records in storage in New York, but also “in the offices and various departments and officers of the Association.”³² Accordingly, Horsch hired a management consulting firm to conduct such a survey. She met with record-keeping experts and visited different archives. Reporting on her upcoming visit to the Ford Archives, she wrote: “Mr. Ford never said a good word about history but he kept every bit of paper which he wrote and I understand it is a gold mine.”³³ She eventually revised the NAM’s entire filing system, establishing, among other things, “history files” on certain issues, such as right to work, automation, taxation, so that one could find the NAM’s positions on those topics at any given time. Former NAM president Walter Fuller explained the value of her work to the Old Timers Council in 1955, citing the importance of orderly record retention: “not only will such a program provide useful records but [it] will save high-priced rental space, avoid duplication in both personnel and filing of material and, what’s more, preserve current and past valuable historical archive material.”³⁴

Not everyone was happy with this activity, however. The head of the Business Management Division wrote a pointed memo to Horsch’s superiors, asking who had authorized Miss Horsch to survey the NAM’s records in the first place. It “invaded” the responsibilities of the Business Management Division, which was never informed of such a survey, and represented a “serious organizational offense.” He demanded that the results of the survey be turned over to him. This would not be the last time Horsch was accused of overstepping her position (although it should be noted she had been authorized to

32. A. K. Steigerwalt to Vada Horsch, November 30, 1955, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

33. Vada Horsch to F. N. Bard (retired), October 19, 1955, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43

34. Report to the Old Timers Council Relative to the NAM’s History Writing Project, January 10, 1956, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43. Sadly, the “History Files” were not kept up after Horsch left office. They make up the so-called “Vada Horsch” files in the NAM Records, but contain only material from the 1950s.

collect materials from all offices).³⁵ A short time later, the Records Management Institute invited Horsch to become a member of their organization's advisory board. The letter, addressed to her superiors, praised her "research and techniques on historical records" and "her awareness of the practical integration of key papers in making and evaluating organization policies."³⁶ A rebuke to the head of Business Management, the letter also suggests how Horsch's work contributed to the organization's own administrative professionalization, something NAM staff regularly promoted for member companies.

In addition to the records inventory, Steigerwalt also proposed gathering oral histories from the Old Timers, which, he wrote, "might very well be the lever by which the entire history project is moved off the ground."³⁷ Aware that the project had stalled and that the senior staff needed to be prodded along, he wrote: "If this idea [the oral history] could be sold to Walter Fuller and two or three members of his committee, I am certain that they would serve as leadership for selling the project to the current staff of the N.A.M."³⁸

Horsch wasted no time in taking this letter to Walter Fuller, who incorporated it in his presentation on the NAM history project to the Old Timers Council in December of 1955. A bit of an Old Timer himself, Fuller was the retired president of Curtis Publishing Company, the publisher of the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Ladies Home Journal*. He had been NAM president in 1941, chairman of the board in 1942, and a member of the executive committee in the late 1940s. In 1955, he was still active in the NAM as an honorary board member. As Steigerwalt had hoped, Fuller became an ally and spurred NAM to move forward on commissioning a history.

By December 1956, Horsch had prepared a plan. Hatched at a two-day conference with the School of Business Administration at the University of Michigan, it recommended that the research and writing be done by a university or college and that Albert Steigerwalt serve as a consultant on the project. Once a university had been chosen, they needed to appoint a director, estimated to cost between \$7500 and \$12,000 per year, as well as an associate director, three full-time research assistants, two full-time secretaries, and two stenographers, adding up to roughly \$28,000 per year for a minimum of four years,

35. On July 28, 1955, Kenneth Miller sent out a memo to staff authorizing Vada Horsch to collect materials. See Vada Horsch to Lambert Miller, February 25, 1960, NAM Records, Series 1, box 42.

36. To Mr. Kenneth Miller, May 22, 1956, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

37. Albert Steigerwalt to Vada Horsch, November 30, 1955, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

38. Ibid.

or \$112,000 total. Horsch listed several ways to finance the project. The easiest, she wrote, might be to enlist the support of interested NAM members to make a grant to a recognized school of business administration. But she also noted that other companies had started foundations for the sole purpose of writing their histories. Here Horsch cited a three-volume study of the Standard Oil Company researched and written by the Business History Foundation, which had been financed by Standard Oil Company.³⁹ Despite the cost, she urged the Old Timers and NAM board members to consider the value of the endeavor: “The tremendous bulge in college enrollments will be a promise in 1960. Until a competent, objective, and detailed history of the NAM is available, there is, to say the least, only negative material about it in our American History text books. Only when the project is finished can we hope to blunt or destroy the distorted history of the Association.”⁴⁰

Representing the Old Timers Council, and no doubt prodded by Horsch, Fuller took the proposal to the executive committee in April 1957. They gave it a very tepid okay, tentatively approving “the idea of investigating the possibilities of the publication of a book on American Industry to be financed by foundations.”⁴¹ The executive committee wanted to limit the NAM’s participation in the venture. It approved the “idea” of a general history of American industry rather than a history of the NAM, and there was no indication that it would provide funding.

The executive committee agreed that the intellectual classes had targeted the NAM and that the history of American industry was being written from the perspective of its enemies. But their previous experiences with the “objectivity” of the academic world had been bruising. In 1940, the NAM had hired Columbia University professor Ralph Robey to survey economics and history textbooks to get an “objective” sense of what textbooks had to say about the free enterprise system and individualism. Robey’s report about textbook bias was widely condemned as “censorship” by the *New Republic*, *The Christian Century*, the *New York Times*, and others, and the NAM quickly distanced

39. The Business History Foundation, Inc., was developed at Harvard Business School by Henrietta Larson and Norman S. B. Gras in 1947. Larson was chief editor of the Standard Oil project. See “Larson, Henrietta, Papers, 1947–1962: A Finding Aid,” at Baker Library, Harvard Business School, <http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~bak00051>.

40. “1957 Report on the NAM History Project,” submitted to Walter D. Fuller, chairman, history project, prepared by Vada Horsch, November 27, 1956, and “The Story of the NAM—The Job to Be Done,” n.d., both found in NAM Records, Series 1, Series 1, box 43.

41. Minutes of the Executive Committee, April 11, 1957, NAM Records, Series 13, box 251.

itself from the controversy.⁴² Then, too, its own book, *The American Individual Enterprise System*, published in 1946, had been widely criticized, if not lampooned, by academics. Nonetheless, Steigerwalt argued that a truly objective, unbiased, history of the NAM and American industry would win over the intellectuals, adding that, “understanding destroys extremism” (which probably wasn’t persuasive to this particular group of extremists).⁴³

At this point, Walter Fuller contacted McGraw-Hill, which prepared a plan for writing and marketing the book.⁴⁴ McGraw-Hill said it could get an author to research and write a book about the NAM for \$20,000, which could be taken from the profits of the book itself. No foundation or elaborate schemes would be necessary. Alarmed, Horsch took it upon herself to send this confidential letter to Steigerwalt, who wrote a passionate reply, intended for Horsch only, that this was exactly the wrong path to take. Steigerwalt feared that whoever McGraw-Hill hired would simply publish more “free enterprise” propaganda, which would provide yet more fodder for the intelligentsia to mock the NAM. He insisted again that the book must be completely researched, its findings based on evidence and fact. He elaborated on his idea for an interdisciplinary team of experts—not just a historian, but a political scientist, a sociologist, an economist, and yes, even a philosopher. They must be associated with a university or an independent foundation such as the Brookings Institute—some outside institution that had legitimacy in the eyes of the liberal intelligentsia. Anything less would defeat the purpose of such a history.⁴⁵

Despite Steigerwalt’s request that Horsch keep this letter to herself, she promptly shared it with Fuller and five other NAM senior staff members, stating her own opinion that they should follow Steigerwalt’s advice on this issue.⁴⁶ One can see here Horsch’s maneuvering to keep the project afloat. Upset by the McGraw-Hill proposal, she got Steigerwalt to voice his disapproval of it, knowing that his voice as a male and a historian carried more weight than hers. Then she seconded his opinion. She was making headway, but mainly with the NAM senior staff and the Old Timers, who one imagines were charmed by Miss Horsch’s attention. Still, that was enough to finally get a committee created in June of 1959.

42. See, e.g., “Looking for the Red Tinge in Textbooks,” *The Christian Century*, December 25, 1941; Henry Canby and Norman Cousins, “The Robey Report,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, March 8, 1941.

43. Steigerwalt, Prospectus, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43

44. McGraw-Hill to Walter Fuller, January 2, 1959, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

45. Steigerwalt to Horsch, January 16, 1959, in Series 1, box 43.

46. Horsch to Fuller, January 19, 1959, Series 1, box 43.

Chaired by Walter Fuller, the “special committee on NAM history project” consisted of three Old Timers and three board members. They represented companies from different regions and included the Old Timers who supported the project, as well as executive committee members Grede (Grede Foundries, steel casings) and Swigert (Hyster Corporation, heavy equipment), who at this point had just formed the John Birch Society. Horsch wrote to members of the new committee, bringing them up to speed and assuring them of Steigerwalt’s correct views and accomplishments.⁴⁷

From here, things moved more swiftly. Steigerwalt was asked to present a revised prospectus for the project at a special session during the board of directors meeting in September 1959. Having researched the schedules of key board members who would be in attendance, Horsch wrote to Fuller with suggestions about who to invite to make the most of the meeting. She was careful to mention that senior staff members had approved her ideas and she included a letter of invitation to be sent out to the names she listed, including the powerful public relations committee.⁴⁸ On the one hand, Horsch was merely doing her job as an organizer of the board meeting. In the context of the slow development of this project, however, her actions have a sense of orchestration about them, as if she was finally fitting together the moving pieces.

At the September meeting, Steigerwalt presented an even more ambitious plan than the one Horsch had earlier drawn up. He advocated the creation of a “University Research Foundation” to “foster, sponsor, and co-ordinate interdisciplinary research by persons in colleges and universities into the determinants of the social, political, intellectual, and economic climate of contemporary society.”⁴⁹ He began with a lengthy exposition on the reasons intellectuals had turned against the competitive, free enterprise system. The only way to reach them, Steigerwalt felt, was through “objective and factual research” on the true nature of business and competition in American life, which would “contribute to the decline in attacks upon the businessman and a revival of confidence in freedom and liberty in society and the elimination of meaningless barriers on incentive and individual effort.”⁵⁰ What Steigerwalt held out to them was the promise of redemption. But it was costly. It would require an initial sum of \$50,000 for incorporating the foundation; then, to be raised through other foundations and private grants, \$934,000 for the purpose of

47. Horsch to Grede, July 9, 1959; see also Horsch to Sligh, January 22, 1959, both in Series 1, box 43.

48. Horsch to Fuller, August 26, 1959, cc to Miller and Sligh, in Series 1, box 43.

49. A. K. Steigerwalt, “University Research Foundation: Proposed Program and Policies,” November 20, 1959, p. 1, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43

50. *Ibid.*, 16.

research grants to an interdisciplinary team of 52 scholars, as well as the publication of their findings.⁵¹

Steigerwalt must have been persuasive, because both the board and the executive committee approved the expenditure of \$50,000 for “an independent, non-profit corporation, which will undertake an objective, scholarly research study of the role, methods, and results of Industrial Development in our social economic system.”⁵² There was only one dissent. Executive committee member Robert Gaylord voted against the proposal. Head of an Illinois-based machine tool company, Gaylord had “doubts about the practicability” of the proposal, as well as the special committee, which he dismissed as made up of “honorary vice-presidents” (i.e., retirees).⁵³ There was also some confusion about whether the focus of the study would be on the “true facts as to what our Association has done,” as the project was originally introduced at the board meeting, or on “the role, methods, and results of Industrial Development in our social economic system,” as the motion that was passed put it.⁵⁴ On the whole, however, the men on the special committee as well as their close associates on the executive committee seemed eager to proceed, although each had questions about the project’s scope and cost.

Fuller thus proceeded, writing to Steigerwalt for more advice on establishing the foundation. Steigerwalt responded to this request somewhat impatiently, inquiring when he could be expected to be put on retainer. He had already produced and revised a prospectus, and if he was to continue to work on the project, he would have to cancel other consulting opportunities. He wrote,

I have been in contact with the Association for more than ten years and although much of this contact has been mutually beneficial, things have indeed moved very slowly. At the risk of appearing unappreciative, let me say that much of my contact with the Association has been on the basis of their asking me what I would advise being done along the lines of a history project.... If I am presently

51. It is worth noting that Steigerwalt’s proposal sounds like the model that the Heritage Foundation and CATO Institute subsequently set up with donations from the type of men on the NAM board, if not the very same men, such as Howard Pew, Pierre Du Pont, and William Grede.

52. Minutes of the Board, September 24–25, 1959 and Minutes of the Executive Committee, September 23, 1959, NAM Records, Series 13, boxes 242 and 251, respectively.

53. Gaylord to Sligh, October 14, 1959, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

54. See Fuller’s report to Kenneth Miller detailing the views of various committee members, Fuller to Miller, November 30, 1959. On different versions of what was endorsed, see attachment of Horsch to Lambert Miller, February 25, 1960, both in NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

impatient it is the result of a growing concern on my part on how long this project will keep me involved without compensation.⁵⁵

This was the beginning of the end. In January 1960, Steigerwalt presented the Association with a bill for his services thus far, totaling in the realm of \$8500.

The men involved were flabbergasted. What had he done worth \$8500? Who had even hired him? There was bafflement, anger, cries not to pay the bill, and finally an informal investigation carried out by NAM general counsel Lambert Miller. The first thing Miller did was write to Vada Horsch to get a record of the NAM's involvement with A. K. Steigerwalt. She was, after all, the resident historian, the keeper of records, the knower of organizational business. Horsch produced a typically thorough (albeit selective) account of the various decisions, meetings, and memos that had been made, held, and exchanged among the men involved. Her own role in the debacle was largely invisible in the official record she compiled. As the executive committee tried to figure out how to proceed, however, committee member Robert Gaylord accused Vada Horsch of misrepresenting the special committee wishes in her minutes of the crucial meeting.⁵⁶ Gaylord had been the lone voice against the history project, and his sharply worded memo about Horsch's intentions can be read as a passive-aggressive reaction to the entire episode. Horsch responded privately to her direct supervisor, but Gaylord demanded that she respond to him personally, as if she were answering charges.⁵⁷ This is the only indication that anyone might have seen Horsch as implicated in these events.

In the end, the NAM paid Steigerwalt \$8650 to avoid a lawsuit.⁵⁸ The various committees rescinded their previous approval for a history project. Walter Fuller conceded that perhaps an "academic" history was unnecessary and that a brief pamphlet about the NAM's origins and achievements "would satisfy at least partially the desire for some of the Association's members for a 'history.'"⁵⁹ Having been briefly

55. Steigerwalt to Fuller, November 4, 1959, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

56. Gaylord to "Gentlemen," February 22, 1960, attention Vada Horsch, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

57. Horsch to Sligh, February 24, 1960; Vada Horsch to Robert Gaylord, May 2, 1960; both in NAM Records, Series 1, box 43. In a first draft of her reply to Gaylord, dated April 30, 1960, Horsch seemed to apologize, falling back on the old saw "to err is human." But in the version that was actually sent, dated May 2, the apology was gone, and she concluded by saying that if there was an error in the minutes it could be easily corrected.

58. Sligh to Fuller, July 21, 1960; Sligh to Steigerwalt, July 21, 1960; both in NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

59. Fuller to Sligh, April 13, 1960, NAM Records, Series 1, box 43.

beguiled by the promise of an objective, professional history, NAM leaders quietly backed away, mystified perhaps that they had gone as far as they had.

The NAM as Progressive Modernizer

What is interesting about Horsch's "objective" history in hindsight is how closely and accurately it reflects the subsequent historical literature on the function of trade associations. Beginning with Louis Galambos's *Cooperation and Competition* (1966) and continuing to Gerald Berk's more recent *Louis D. Brandeis and the Making of Regulated Competition* (2009), historians have seen trade associations as a progressive response to the chaos of unregulated capitalism and uncoordinated growth.⁶⁰ Trade associations were crucial to American capitalism's transition in the early twentieth century from small, family-owned and controlled firms founded on principles of competition to large, multidivisional, professionally managed corporations, in which cooperation, shared information, and standardization among firms replaced cutthroat competition.⁶¹ Trade associations organized, rationalized, and standardized industry, creating what Gerald Berk calls a "collaborative learning system."⁶²

As Horsch tried to show, the NAM was involved in something resembling a "collaborative learning system," sharing information about costs, shipping routes, freight rates, accounting techniques, and myriad other items that Alfred Steigerwalt's history of the early NAM painstakingly detailed.⁶³ The NAM also offered member companies "best practices" guidelines in everything from hiring and promotion to worker safety to radio intercom systems. The more rationalized industry became, the more information there was to be researched and shared. That was the work of the NAM staff. Vada Horsch seemed to

60. Though there are different schools of thought regarding the emergence of the administrative state and the rise of corporate capitalism, scholars identify trade associations as playing an important and positive role in stabilizing and transforming American capitalism. See Berk, *Louis D. Brandeis*; Himmelberg, *The Origins of the National Recovery Administration*; Galambos, *Cooperation and Competition*, throughout.

61. See especially, Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform*; Galambos *Cooperation and Competition*; Berk, *Louis D. Brandeis*; Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of Capitalism*.

62. Berk, *Louis D. Brandeis*, esp. 29–30.

63. Steigerwalt, *The National Association of Manufacturers*, 47–81. Interestingly, Galambos slammed Steigerwalt's book for "bias" in his *Business History Review* review, even as he acknowledged the importance of NAM's promotion of trade, its safety work, and its support of consular reform.

explicitly, consciously, proudly understand the ways in which NAM staff contributed to the development of the modern, safe, cooperative, rational, and efficient capitalism of the 1950s. Thus, while she had an “interested” perspective (as opposed to an “objective” one), it turned out to be historically (if not objectively) correct—at least according to subsequent professional historians of trade associations.

Horsch not only articulated this history, she was also a product of it. The rationalization of corporate life brought with it a proliferation of professional administrative positions that created opportunities for women.⁶⁴ And not just as typists. Historian Martin Sklar described the new corporate order as a “frontier of democracy,” offering “new avenues of ascent and opportunity.”⁶⁵ Whereas once managers and department heads had risen from the ranks of production-line employees, an avenue largely closed to women, the new managers, department heads, administrators, consultants, researchers, and social workers who filled an expanding administrative sector were professionally trained at business schools, an avenue open to women.⁶⁶

To the extent that these were new jobs, developed at a time when more women were becoming educated and pursuing not just wage work, but careers, they had not congealed into male-only positions. They were male dominated, yes, but not exclusively male the way line jobs and executive positions were. As the provider of administrative information and tips to smaller business concerns who did not have the resources to hire their own researchers, the NAM hired this new class of employee. Vada Horsch was not the only professional woman working at the NAM in this period. Women’s names pepper the NAM research staffs and reports, particularly in the area of employee relations. Some, like Phyllis Moerhle, the NAM’s resident expert on African Americans in industry, would eventually become vice presidents.⁶⁷

The thoroughly modern Vada Horsch stood in contrast to NAM conservatives who were by their own admission, standing “athwart history,” and who were, in the eyes of the corporate liberal establishment, “backwards-looking,” unable to accept the ideological changes required by the new managerial capitalism.⁶⁸ One reason NAM leaders were not more interested in a history of NAM’s contributions to

64. Strom, *Beyond the Typewriter*; Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy*; Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business*, 75.

65. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of Capitalism*, 26

66. See Jacoby, *Employing Bureaucracy*; Khurana, *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands*; Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation*.

67. NAM, *1973 Annual Report*; Moerhle biography in *Enterprise* (March 1979): 31.

68. On the cultural and ideological shifts that undergirded the modern corporate capitalism that Chandler describes, see Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of Capitalism*; McQuaid, *Uneasy Partners*.

the development of American capitalism might have been because they did not like what American capitalism had become. They were deeply uncomfortable with the post–World War II corporate capitalism that seemed willing to work with unions and the government and that emphasized teamwork over individualism, cooperation over competition, and information over gut feelings. They blamed the government, unions, and socialists for the disappearance of “competition” and “individualistic free enterprise,” but their negative attitude to the work of the NAM staff might also have reflected a subconscious suspicion that the NAM might also be complicit.

Contrary to common depictions of the NAM, conservatives were never the total sum of the organization. Horsch’s insistence on a “real” history, her faith in documentation and evidence, so easy to scorn from our enlightened postmodern academic perches, was a neutral and, she hoped, persuasive way to convince her superiors to help her correct the mistaken idea—perpetrated by the “biased” media—that the NAM was a conservative, backward organization. Horsch was no radical. She was conservative in manner, a Republican, and certainly no fan of unions. But she was frustrated that the NAM leadership kept reinforcing the public’s image of the association as a stodgy, old-fashioned organization. From her perspective, the NAM was forward-looking and progressive, helping members adjust to a changing world and contributing to the expansion of foreign trade, safer workplaces, and better working conditions. The NAM was aligned with history, not against it. As both corporate liberals and New Deal liberals agreed, all elements of society were becoming more centralized and bureaucratized—this was the direction of history, not an ideological argument.⁶⁹ And the NAM—her NAM—had played a role in organizing and bureaucratizing industry and society. An objective history of the NAM’s actual accomplishments (not its ineffectual ideological grandstanding) was her way of “setting the record straight.” So, again, her stance was “interested,” but not historically inaccurate.

Shortly after the history project met its death, the NAM board hired a consulting firm to reorganize its governing structure. The conservatives who dominated the executive committee for more than a decade suspected that this might be an attempt to oust them. It was. In 1962, Werner P. Gullander, an executive from General Dynamics and an exemplary corporate liberal, stepped in as the NAM’s first salaried, permanent president. Among the many changes Gullander instituted in his ten-year regime was a beefing up of staff divisions, especially in the area of industrial relations and international affairs. He initiated new programs to help companies hire and promote African Americans,

69. Versions of this New Deal argument are analyzed in Brinkley, *The End of Reform*, chaps. 1, 2; Drucker, *New Society*, throughout.

employ the disadvantaged, and increase exports.⁷⁰ The NAM continued to oppose government regulations and the “labor monopoly,” of course, but it did so alongside staff programs designed to help its members adjust to new government regulations, civil rights legislation, and the reality of labor unions. Horsch’s work was at last vindicated as the NAM’s new leadership finally accepted the transformation of American capitalism.

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70. See Delton, *Racial Integration and Corporate America*, chap. 7. See also Soffer, “The National Association of Manufacturers and the Militarization of American Conservatism,” who argues that defense contractors played a role in NAM’s transformation.

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