



## **PRESS RELEASE**

February 21, 2019

For Immediate Release

Contact: Willie R. Tubbs

Phone: (225) 936-8565

Email: wtubbs@uwf.edu

*Written by Willie R. Tubbs*

### **Collins' term as president latest notch in career of service to AJHA**

Dr. Ross F. Collins, of North Dakota State University and currently serving a one-year term as president of the American Journalism Historians Association, has been a member of AJHA longer than he's been a professor, and his tenure in that capacity dates back to 1993.

Although he didn't attend his first AJHA conference until 1996, Collins joined the organization while still a graduate student.

"I was hoping to find a group of scholars as passionate about this area of research as I was," Collins said. "I wanted an opportunity to meet colleagues from all kinds of backgrounds, including historical scholars who did not necessarily have a journalism background. I searched out those who were interested in an international perspective as I was."

In the years since, Collins served AJHA in virtually every capacity, including board member, member of numerous committees, treasurer, second vice-president, and first vice-president.

"I served on my first committee in 1998, called the outreach committee, to raise AJHA visibility among other history and communication scholarly organizations," Collins said. "A couple years later I happened to be standing in the right, or maybe wrong, place when the treasurer resigned. He turned to me and said (more or less), 'you there—you want to take over?'"

"I had just achieved tenure at North Dakota State and realized that without my AJHA colleagues' encouragement and mentoring I likely would not have published enough scholarship to make tenure at a research university. I decided to make a bigger commitment to AJHA not only as a way of paying back, but also as a way of encouraging graduate students and younger scholars to see journalism history as a lively, fascinating and career-building area of research."

Collins has always tried to make the most of his terms of service. To that end, he has outlined a robust vision for AJHA.

"The AJHA as a historical discipline is closely tied to the journalism profession itself," Collins said. "And as journalism has suffered, so have we. We know fewer universities require, or even offer, mass media history at any level, despite its obvious significance to the profession. Traditional journalism programs have closed. Membership in our organization is not growing, just as it is apparently not in the large umbrella associations like AEJMC.

"I don't know how to respond to today's enormous challenge to journalism's base economic model. I don't think anyone does. But we can respond to challenges of our own organization. We can work to

become more prominent within the discipline and beyond. We can remind scholars that journalism history is—and I think this needs to come first—fun!”

Beyond fun, Collins added, the work of mass media historians is also important.

“(Mass media history) addresses the critical significance of the journalism profession to the survival of democracy here and abroad,” Collins said. “My hope this year is to raise our visibility and to encourage more journalism history scholarship. We hope to encourage more universities to offer coursework in journalism history, and more members to join the camaraderie of AJHA knowing we are doing work that’s important—and fun!”

Collins credits numerous founding and prominent members of AJHA with helping him to find his way both in the organization and in his own research.

“As a new scholar at my first conference, the very first person I met was Alf Pratte,” Collins said. “I was, ironically, in the bar of the London (Ontario) conference venue. He introduced himself and immediately suggested I become involved.

“Wally Eberhard challenged and encouraged my ideas, and served as an external examiner for my tenure file. Jean Palmegiano asked me to serve on my first committee. We later collaborated on a book covering international journalism history.

“Dave Copeland encouraged me to write two books for his history series as well as two monographs for *Media History Monographs*. Jim Startt encouraged and critiqued my work on World War I. William David Sloan, one of AJHA’s founders, encouraged me to run for an office in the organization, and Mike Sweeney gave me an all-too-generous speech of nomination.

“Dianne Bragg and Dave Vergobbi, my predecessors, calmed my occasional fits of panic as conference schedule coordinator. I could cite many more. One thing is true: while my work in journalism history certainly has been modest compared to theirs, if not for them, I doubt that work would exist at all, nor would I have gotten tenure and promotion. AJHA is the place to be if you want the mentoring we all need to succeed as scholars in a truly fascinating discipline.”

Collins will continue to serve as AJHA president through the 2019 national convention, held Oct. 3-5 in Dallas. On Oct. 5, Collins will move into another role, that of immediate past president, when current first vice president Donna Lampkin Stephens of the University of Central Arkansas assumes the title of president.

Collins has a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge and a master’s degree from the University of Warwick, both UK, and a undergraduate degrees from Minnesota State University Moorhead. He specializes in French journalism history.

Founded in 1981, the American Journalism Historians Association seeks to advance education and research in mass communication history. Members work to raise historical standards and ensure that all scholars and students recognize the vast importance of media history and apply this knowledge to the advancement of society. For more information on AJHA, visit <http://www.ajhaonline.org>.

###