



SHEAR

Mary Kelley Citation SHEAR Distinguished Service Award

July 19, 2025 —This year's Distinguished Service Award goes to longtime SHEAR friend and benefactor Mary Kelley. I could not think of anyone more deserving than Mary for this award, who is not only of the most distinguished historians of early America but also an indefatigable champion of SHEAR. Mary has served our organization in so many capacities and has been such a generous donor to it that I am nervous that I might leave out something in this citation for her. Mary has been President of SHEAR, has served in the Advisory Council, the *JER* Editorial Board, and most recently, graciously accepted to serve in the Investment or Finance Committee for the SHEAR250 Capital Campaign. When I asked Mary to serve on this committee, despite shouldering numerous other commitments, she immediately said yes. Her dedication to serving SHEAR in whatever capacity she could was evident. Some of us here have been in SHEAR long enough to know all that she has done for this organization in good and bad times.

In 2009, she co-initiated with Cathy Kelly of the Omohundro Institute, a delightful fixture at our annual conference, the Boydston Women's Breakfast in honor of the late Jeanne Boydston. I think Cathy put it best, so I am going to quote her, "Mary was a stalwart supporter of the Boydston breakfast from its inception, always taking care to share with attendees the importance of Jeanne's contributions to the field and to SHEAR proper. Mary's remarks, generous, elegant, and clear on the connections between organizations, networks, and knowledge production, typify Mary's approach to institutions and institution building. SHEAR is fortunate to have benefited from her service not only at the Boydston Breakfast but along multiple axes. Mary has done more for early American women's history in SHEAR than anyone else. It should not be a surprise that SHEAR's annual Best Book in Women's History award is named after her. It is a small token of our gratitude for her multiple contributions to our organization.

This citation could simply be a run-down of Mary's many years and long list of service to SHEAR and it would be impressive. For us to get a proper sense of the extent of Mary's contributions, however, I will quote Sheila Skemp, a fantastic women's historian in her own right. "When Mary came to the University of Iowa, she came with a clear vision and a determination to get the job done that most of us didn't really have. She was focused and organized and had a plan for going forward that eluded the rest of us. I think we were all a little in awe of her....She was the first person I knew, who had a sense of the importance of women's history. We had no women faculty in our department. There were no women's history courses. And, of course, the term "gender" had not yet penetrated our consciousness. Mary was so far ahead of the rest of us! But although she was focused and hard-working, she was also there for anyone who needed advice, comforting, or encouragement. She quickly became a person we instinctively turned to whenever we needed help in big or little ways. My sense is, watching her career since then, that she was already laying the groundwork for the kind of professional she would become. She was—and is—a mentor, a selfless promotor of other scholars, and a dedicated teacher. I'd like to think it all started at Iowa, but I suspect that's just the way she has always been."

It's precisely this kind of drive, inspiration, and the scholarly ethic of writing women's history as well as supporting other women and historians that Mary brought to SHEAR and we have long

been the beneficiaries of her generosity and work. Personally, it has been my great privilege to have worked with her and learned from her, whether it was long phone conversations or occasional zoom meetings this past year. She was always generous with her advice and support. I am delighted to present SHEAR's Distinguished Service Award for 2025 to Mary Kelley.

—Manisha Sinha, President of SHEAR