

NNEPA ORIGINS

Although VT, NH, and ME have had a number of good philosophy departments and philosophy programs, there were and are no graduate philosophy programs. This was a common feature of the academic life of philosophers in these three states. In addition to the recognition of this commonality in the late 60s and early 70s, it was also noticed that the local philosophy gatherings in the Boston area tended to focus on the papers of scholars from institutions with philosophy graduate programs. Furthermore, many of these Boston-centered meetings were specialized. A small group of philosophy faculty from institutions north of Boston knew good philosophy was being done there, but also realized there were very limited opportunities for these faculty to share their work with one another. This led to a car ride from UNH to Plymouth State, and another up to Dartmouth, and the kernel idea of NNEPA was formed: A venue for regional philosophers to share work, with no topical restrictions or restrictions on philosophical orientation.

Some of the key founding members were:

Peter Sylvester (UNH),
Val Dusek (UNH),
Bob Scharff (UNH),
Herb Otto (Plymouth State),
Frank Birmingham (New England College),
Tim Duggan (Dartmouth College).

And it appears that Peter Sylvester was the first to broach exploring some sort of regional meeting (thus the traditional Keynote address was named after him).

Although some of the earliest details seem to be lost in the mists of history, according to records and memories, the first meeting of NNEPA was in 1972. The initial thought was to meet twice a year and without any notion of a keynote speaker. Soon after, the pattern settled on was to meet once a year, typically during the fall semester, and to name a host institution and a Coordinator (later "President") from the host's philosophy department for that year's meeting. The next year, the location would rotate to another philosophy department in the region, with another local Coordinator/President, and so forth. Since there are a number of philosophy departments in MA that are similarly situated to those in VT, NH, and ME, NNEPA was soon expanded to include hosting in MA. The idea of a distinguished visitor quickly emerged. And eventually, so did the idea of a Plenary Session on a distinguished visitor's work. Likewise, an oversight position emerged, that of an Executive Secretary. The rest, as they say, is History, as encoded in this year's program, and its many similar predecessors.

[The two videos at this link, provide historical context, as well as some details.]