



The Newsletter of the

2025

GRATEFUL DEAD STUDIES ASSOCIATION



Welcome

Greetings from the Executive Council! Since our last newsletter, we have been hard at work on a range of projects, and we're pleased to report on our progress. It's been an eventful year, both for the Association and for the Dead: we had our fifth annual meeting in New Orleans in April, and the band celebrated their sixtieth anniversary in San Francisco in August; those milestones bracket a wealth of work that underscores the vitality of Dead studies and the vibrant discourse community that sustains it.

Our conference meeting is the forum where that community meets to present our research and renew ties, refine thoughts, and develop ideas. At the business meeting in New Orleans, we voted to move the Association's annual conference to the Southwest Popular Culture Association. We are grateful to the PCA/ACA for hosting us for our first five years, and this move will let us build on that foundation by giving us greater flexibility and control in programming as well as lower costs for attendees. We thank Lynnea Chapman King and the other members of the SWPACA executive team for welcoming us and working hard to help us make our next meeting a landmark event.

Details of the conference follow (p.2), along with discussions of forthcoming Association publications (p.3) and a survey of notable additions to the Dead studies bookshelf this year (p.4). The core of that work remains the music, and that continues to be both a driver and a bellwether of the field. This past year, scholars and listeners have welcomed historic releases by Rhino that deepened our understanding of the Dead's past, along with a plethora of concerts by surviving band members that point to the future. Their continued work is augmented by a growing number of talented, passionate, and creative musicians reinventing and extending the Dead's repertoire and approach. The evolution of the music, and its expanding archival legacy, not only enriches our scholarship but gives it a relevance and readership that fuels the Association's work.

That work continues to grow and evolve. Over the past year, the Council has been working on our publications program, and this newsletter marks the last one in this format. As we work to enhance the Association's online presence and digital outreach, print has become unwieldy, expensive, and anachronistic. Our next newsletter will be digital, reflecting the reading preferences of most of our members and also allowing us to coordinate across online platforms, increasing our visibility as well as the frequency of our communications.

The Council is working on these and several other initiatives, and we hope you can join us in Albuquerque in February for the crown jewel of our efforts. As always, we thank you for your participation and support!

The Executive Council



In This Issue

Welcome

Sixth Annual Grateful Dead Studies Association Meeting

GDSA Sponsors
New Books

Dead Studies Spotlight: New Additions to the Grateful Dead Bookshelf

Published by the Grateful Dead Studies Association. Contents © GDSA, 2025. All rights reserved. Banner photographs © Susana Millman. Used with permission. All other photographs and images courtesy the photographers and/or their respective rights-holders.





Albuquerque At Night

Albuquerque 2026

Sixth Annual Meeting Set for February 24–28

When the members gathered for the Association's annual meeting in New Orleans voted to move our conference to the Southwest Popular Culture Association, scholars who had first presented at the Grateful Dead area there were delighted. One of the oldest regional organizations affiliated with the Popular Culture Association, the SWPACA will celebrate their forty-seventh anniversary in 2026. In that time it has grown into a respected international multidisciplinary forum that rivals the PCA/ACA in size and reputation.

The SWPACA's Grateful Dead area is a sign of that success. Just as PCA cofounder Ray Browne supported the establishment of regional associations to expand the study of popular culture, the Grateful Dead Studies Association is proof of the SWPACA's work to support more specialized discourse communities and emerging fields within the broader scope of popular culture studies.

"We're delighted with the members' decision to bring the Association to Albuquerque," Association President Susan Balter-Reitz

commented. "For decades, the Southwest PCA has provided an essential scholarly forum for the field of Dead studies, and it occupies a special place in the history of the Association as the site where we voted to incorporate."

Albuquerque's role in Grateful Dead history began long before the SWPACA's Dead area began. The city is a locale in Hunter's larger lyricscape, serving

as a setting in his "Alligator Moon" suite, but it is best known for hosting two legendary concerts. The Dead first played Albuquerque in 1971 at the Civic Auditorium, released as *Dave's Picks 26*, and their October 7, 1977, show at the University of New Mexico cemented the city's place in Dead lore. This year's meeting honors that heritage and also marks the thirtieth anniversary of the first Grateful Dead conference sessions devoted to the Dead. In 1996, Robert G. Weiner convened two panels on the Dead at the SWPACA. The success of those prompted him to push for the establishment of a dedicated area, which first met in 1998. Nicknamed the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus, the area's long history has vindicated his faith, and that makes the decision to move to SWPACA especially appropriate.

"The rich history of the Caucus makes the Southwest PCA the perfect home for the Association's meetings," President-Elect Deepak Sarma explained. "We look forward to welcoming our members and all scholars to a truly special conference, with a number of surprises and special events planned." Sessions are limited, but the GDSA has arranged with the SWPACA to begin a day early, on the 24th, to give us more time and flexibility.

Abstracts can be submitted now at <https://swpaca.org/app>; for more information, go to <https://swpaca.org/getting-started/>. We'll post updated information at the Association website, www.deadstudies.org, as it becomes available. We look forward to welcoming our members, presenters, and guests in just a few months for what will be a marquee conference!

Albuquerque 2026

- 5 days, February 24–28, 2025
- All sessions held at the Albuquerque Marriott, 2101 Louisiana NE
- Proposals due October 31
- Early (reduced fee) registration closes January 5
- Regular registration closes January 20
- Late registration ends February 28



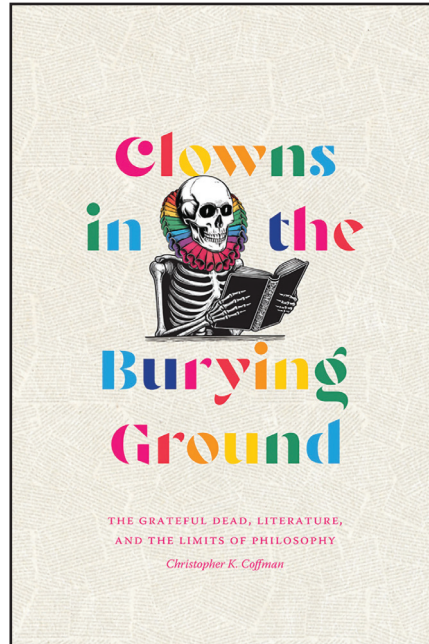
GDSA Sponsors New Books

Two Landmark Critical and Creative Works for 2026

This spring, the third volume in the Association-sponsored series *Studies in the Grateful Dead* will be published by Duke University Press. Written by Association Charter Member Christopher K. Coffman, a senior lecturer at Boston University, *Clowns in the Burying Ground: The Grateful Dead, Literature, and the Limits of Philosophy* offers a sustained literary examination of the Dead's work. "This kind of study has been a major lacuna in the field," editorial board member Jay Williams noted. Williams, who is also a Charter Member of the Association, has long championed the literary dimension of Grateful Dead studies, which his own work has pioneered as well.

That view has found adherents in some surprising quarters, with scholars far removed from both contemporary literature and popular culture expressing interest in Coffman's book. "We're excited to have such a strong volume in the series," added Dean Smith, the director of the press and the acquiring editor of the series. "Chris's thoughtful, incisive argument not only makes a powerful contribution to the field, it will also provide a strong foundation for further work."

In addition to sponsoring the series, the Association also publishes our own primary texts. Following the success of Nathaniel Racine's edition of Grateful Dead lyricist Robert M. Petersen's chapbook *Before Memory*, the Association will honor poet Robert Cooperman's five decades of work by publishing his

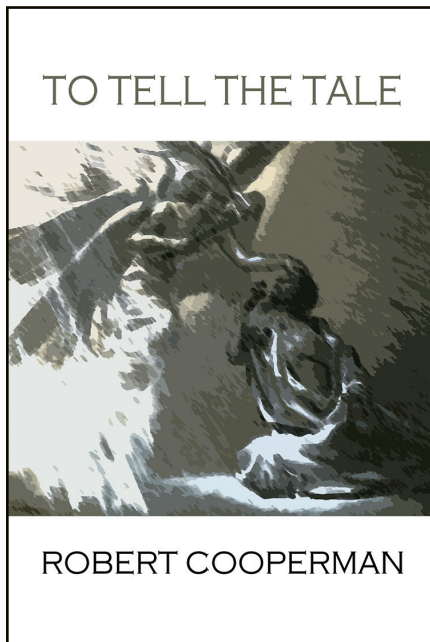


Christopher K. Coffman's *Clowns in the Burying Ground: The Grateful Dead, Literature, and the Limits of Philosophy*, the third volume in the Duke University Press series *Studies in the Grateful Dead*, scheduled to be published in spring 2026

latest book to coincide with our 2026 conference. The sixth collection of his poetry inspired by the Grateful Dead, *To Tell the Tale* is Cooperman's thirty-sixth book, and it makes a fitting capstone to his years of thought and work on the band and its artistic impact.

"Poetry is a form that winds throughout the Grateful Dead phenomenon, from band to fans," Association Past President G. Ganter noted. "That makes it especially appropriate for us to publish the work of the writer who has done more to show how the Dead's literary influence extends to contemporary poetry than anyone else." Ganter speaks from personal experience: both he and Cooperman presented at the first meeting of the SWPACA Grateful Dead area in 1998.

Both books build on the Association's commitment to recognizing the ways that the Dead's project translates to a wide array of contexts. While the focus of the GDSA is scholarly, the academy has long been a home for creative writers as well. And our mission to foster wider engagement with the band's work echoes the Dead's belief that their project could serve as a model, even in fields far removed from popular music. These books show that the Dead's hopes were not misplaced—and continue to inspire.



Dead Studies Spotlight

New Books Expand the Discourse

The Dead & Company concerts held in August to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Dead's founding prompted a flurry of commentary, spurred by several new books. Association member Jim Newton's *Here Beside the Rising Tide: Jerry Garcia, the Grateful Dead, and an American Awakening* frames Garcia's life against the backdrop of the enormous changes that swept the U.S. beginning in the 1960s. His is not the first history to apply a political lens to the band; Carol Brightman's 1998 *Sweet Chaos: The Grateful Dead's American Adventure* analyzed the Dead's project in that light. But Newton's decades of work as a political journalist and biographer give his research and analysis a unique and timely slant, especially given Garcia's oft-quoted and largely misunderstood disavowal of politics. Most of all, Newton's thoughtful treatment addresses his subject's charisma and protean talent in a critical biography that provides a compelling argument for why Garcia's music and work continue to inspire, now thirty years since his passing.

Journalist Brian Anderson turned a fascination with the Wall of Sound, the Dead's fabled PA, into a sustained exploration of the band's wide-ranging efforts to improve their concert sound. A handful of articles, along with Blair Jackson's 2006 *Grateful Dead Gear*, outline that work, but Anderson's *Loud and Clear: The Grateful Dead's Wall of Sound and the Quest for Audio Perfection* is the first in-depth foray into this aspect of the band's project. Informed by interviews with the engineers, technicians, and crew who designed, built, maintained, and transported the system, the book features a wealth of new details. Anderson uses the Wall of Sound as a way of assessing the band's myriad technical and acoustic innovations, not just as a concrete example of their multifaceted commitment to excellence but as a centerpiece of their career, offering a vital corrective to narratives that gloss over the significance of the band's innovations and technological accomplishments.

Len Dell'Amico witnessed that commitment as well. From 1980 to Garcia's death in 1995, he lent his skills in film and video to a range of projects that helped define the Dead's visual identity. His memoir provides an insider's look at how the Dead recruited diverse talents to help them achieve their larger artistic goals. Dell'Amico played a central role in the creation of the band's 1986 documentary *So Far*, and his skills were instrumental in the band's video work in the 1980s and 1990s. Scholars such as Dennis Rothermel are bringing attention to Garcia's work as a filmmaker; *Friend of the Devil* offers an inside look at why that topic provides a rich and largely overlooked side of the Dead's achievement.

The Dead attracted many gifted photographers during their career, but Jim Marshall had unusual access. A gifted portrait and documentary photographer, Marshall built an intimate

archive of the band, more than 52,000 pictures capturing the Dead with candor and sensitivity. Journalist and Dead expert David Gans and Amelia Davis, Marshall's archivist, assembled a collection rich in biographical insight and historical detail for their *The Grateful Dead by Jim Marshall: Photos and Stories from the Formative Years, 1966-1977*. Their commentary, along with an afterword by Dead & Company's John Mayer, make it clear that this is more than a coffee-table book.

All four books speak to the ongoing interest in the history of the Grateful Dead and underscore the relevance of the Association's scholarly mission. As the popular interest in the Dead continues to grow, it is heartening to see studies that engage a broad readership by experts whose work reflects the seriousness of their subject. More than just testaments to the band's enduring appeal, these books point to the wealth of work that lies ahead.

