



Minnesota deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing project documents activism

By Mary Hartnett and Barbara W. Sommer

WITH THE SUPPORT of the Minnesota Historical Society, the Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans and oral historian Barb Sommer collaborated on an Oral-Visual History Project to record, collect and preserve the stories of deaf, deafblind, and hard of hearing advocates for community activism in Minnesota. The project is called an oral-visual history project to indicate its roots in the oral history process while reflecting the fact that the interviewees used a wide spectrum of communication modes, including visual and tactile sign languages. This video collection represents a valuable record of the deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing community's diverse experiences and unique languages and cultures and the significant contributions the community has made to Minnesota history.

All the oral-visual history interview materials were produced or remastered to comply with accepted oral history standards and accessibility standards required under Section 508 of the federal Rehabilitation Act and will be archived at the Minnesota Historical Society.

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Doing oral history through a high school-public radio partnership

By Aishwarya Gautam, Shrutika Vaidya and Sarah J. Yockey

(Uni High Class of 2012 and co-producers of "Beyond the Tie-Dye: Counterculture in Champaign-Urbana, 1965-1975" and Janet Morford, Dept. of Social Studies, University Laboratory High School)

IT'S 5:45 P.M. and although it is after hours at the WILL radio station in Urbana, Illinois, there is a hum of activity.

Nervous eighth graders are waiting for their interviewee to arrive. When she walks in, they stumble over themselves to make introductions. One offers to take the interviewee's coat. They make their way to a grouping of couches on the second level of the building, making small talk just the way they had practiced.

Finally, their classmate emerges from the studio saying, "We're all set, come on back."

They settle the interviewee into her seat, and the students take their places. They are tightly packed into the small, soundproof room. The technician conducts a few sound checks. Everyone settles in, and the recording starts.

"This is Will Erickson, interviewing Mildred Ransom for the Uni High oral history project on gender equity."

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From the president

By Mary Larson

“PLANNING” HAS BEEN the watchword for us here in the past few months as we have been getting ready for both the annual conference and for charting the OHA’s direction going forward.

Preparations for this year’s annual meeting in Oklahoma City are well under way, and we’re very excited about all of the wonderful things that are being arranged by the team in charge. Stephen Sloan is overseeing everything as OHA’s vice president, the program committee is being chaired by Beth Millwood and Todd Moye, and the local arrangements committee is headed up by Tanya Finchum and Larry O’Dell. The conference will offer some fantastic opportunities for workshops and tours, and there are some great plenaries and keynotes lined up, so please read the related article in this newsletter for more of the details.

We’ve been talking about the OHA’s administrative transition through the past few *Newsletters*, and at the beginning of January our new headquarters at Georgia State officially opened, with Cliff Kuhn at the helm as executive director. We’re very excited about all of the things that are happening and the enthusiasm that Cliff and new program associate Gayle Knight, as well as their graduate employees, have for the OHA. Articles about our association with Georgia State have already appeared in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* and other publications, so we have been making a considerable splash in the media.

Cliff and Gayle have been making changes to the OHA website, and we hope to be increasing our social media presence

in the future, as well. With the increased activity on our Facebook page and Twitter feeds, in addition to all that is going on with the *Oral History Review’s* Facebook page and blog, there are a lot of different avenues for accessing information about our organization, so please take advantage of them.



OHA president, Mary Larson

As part of the work of this transition, Council will be entering into a phase of strategic planning for the organization, and you may have seen the surveys that have been circulated. We are using the responses from the surveys to help with our planning sessions at the mid-winter meeting and throughout the coming year. We will be working with an outside consultant, Janet Rechtman, who will be helping us with this process, and we hope to have a number of new initiatives charted by the time all is said and done. We can only do this because of your help in responding to our request for input, and we are grateful for all of those who participated.

It is an exciting time to be involved with OHA, with all of the changes and opportunities, and I am energized by all of the activity. I hope you are, as well, and that you will be joining us in Oklahoma City for the annual conference in October. ❖

Executive Director’s Report

By Cliff Kuhn

THE OHA OFFICE has been a hive of activity since the move to Georgia State University and the switch to a new executive structure. In January, Gayle Knight, the OHA program associate, came on board and immediately had to help with the processing of paper and panel submissions for the 2013 annual meeting—which promises to be stellar.

Kathy Nasstrom helped kick off the launch of the office at GSU with a terrific lecture on how oral history has intersected with three waves of civil rights scholarship. Madelyn Campbell visited for four days and imparted a great deal of her seemingly inexhaustible wealth of organizational knowledge. And Doug Boyd spent a day with the office staff doing training around the OHA website as well as giving a presentation on oral history in the digital age. Better utilization of the website has been one of the office’s main priorities, and Sara Patenaude and Amy Rocamora, the two graduate students assigned to the office, have devoted considerable time to streamlining and upgrading the site, along with adding content.

In February, I spent a week in Washington, D.C., making the rounds with representatives of various agencies and entities, including the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Historical Association, the American Folklife Center, the Federation of State Humanities Councils, the National Council for the Social Studies and the National Park Service. The point of these meetings was to help place the OHA in greater

dialogue with these groups, in order to work for the mutual benefit of all parties and to elevate oral history practice among diverse constituencies. I was frankly touched by the generous reception I experienced, an indication that this is indeed a propitious time for the move to the new OHA executive structure.



Cliff Kuhn, OHA executive director

In conjunction with OHA Council, we have also moved forward with the strategic planning process for the OHA—where would we like to be in five years and how do we take steps to get there. A survey for both OHA members and non-members was developed and distributed through the website, H-Oralhist and the OHA Facebook page, with a high rate of response. (I urge you to regularly consult each of these communication platforms.)

We have contracted with a consultant to assist with strategic planning, and by the time this piece appears in the *Newsletter*, will have held a planning session at the Council mid-winter meeting. I encourage OHA members and associates to actively invest in the strategic planning process as we move the organization into a new era of its history. ❖

PHOTO: MICHELLE LACOSS

Fall conference to explore hidden stories

By Beth Millwood and Todd Moyer, Program Co-Chairs

ORAL HISTORIANS WILL gather at the historic Skirvin Hilton Hotel in Oklahoma City Oct. 9-13 for the 47th annual meeting of the Oral History Association. Organized around the theme of "Hidden Stories, Contested Truths: The Craft of Oral History," the annual meeting will include a rich and diverse collection of presentations as part of concurrent sessions and will showcase plenary sessions, featured speakers and performers who use and examine oral history in exciting ways.

Speakers and presenters will come from South America, Europe, Asia and Oceania, along with nearly every corner of the United States. As befits the particular history of our meeting place, several panels and events will be devoted to the practice of oral history with indigenous peoples.

The program committee has shaped a program that offers fresh new interpretations of the ways in which oral history has been used to unearth hidden stories and contest accepted truths. As we all know, through work to address silences, oral

history provides a method by which unknown experiences and fresh perspectives can come to light and provide scholars and communities a more robust understanding of the past. It holds the power to defy stereotypes and challenge simple generalizations.

Oklahoma City offers an ideal setting to host this discussion. Since its instant founding during the Land Run of 1889, Oklahoma City's rich history runs from great triumph to profound tragedy. OKC now stands as a key



Oklahoma City Skyline, courtesy of the Oklahoma City Convention Visitors Bureau.

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Nominees announced for OHA leadership positions

The OHA Nominating Committee is pleased to present the following slate for the 2013 election:

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT

Anne M. Valk, *Brown University*

FOR COUNCIL (two nominees for one vacant position)

COUNCIL SEAT NO. 1

- 1) **Amy Starecheski**, *Columbia University*
- 2) **Sharon Utakis**, *Bronx Community College, CUNY*

NOMINATING COMMITTEE POSITIONS

SEAT NO. 1

Rosemarie Esber, *Independent scholar (based currently in Maryland)*

Maria Beltran-Vocal, *Latin American and Latino Studies, DePaul University*

SEAT NO. 2

Curtis Austin, *African American Studies, Ohio State University*

Alva Stevenson, *UCLA Center for Oral History Research*

SEAT NO. 3

Irene Reti, *Regional History Project, University of California, Santa Cruz*

Norma Smith, *Independent scholar (based currently in the Bay Area, California)*

OHA hires new staff member

By Cliff Kubn, Executive Director

THE ORAL HISTORY

Association is delighted to announce the hiring of Gayle Knight as the new program associate in the OHA executive office.

Gayle brings outstanding credentials to the position. For the past five years, she has been the housing and registration coordinator for the Society of Biblical Literature, a scholarly organization that, in conjunction with the American Academy of Religion, sponsors an annual meeting of close to 10,000 people, along with an international meeting and several regional meetings. In that capacity, Gayle has extensive experience working with hotels, supervising registration, dealing with exhibitors and advertisers and offering membership support.

Gayle also has a degree in architectural history from the University of Virginia and a master's degree in historic preservation from Cornell University. She had her own city planning consulting firm, mainly handling community development block grants for smaller municipalities in metro Atlanta.



Gayle Knight

File update

If you haven't done so yet, update your contact information for the Oral History Association, now headquartered at Georgia State University. The mailing address is:

Oral History Association, c/o Department of History, **Georgia State University**, P.O. Box 4117, Atlanta, GA 30302-4117. Telephone: 404-413-5751 | Email: oha@gsu.edu.

Minnesota deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing activism

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Work on this project was done in the spring of 2011. The collection includes seven new interviews recorded through the project, 14 re-mastered heritage interviews with updated access (1997), 29 “Signs of Minnesota” television interviews with updated access (2004) and a 2010 presentation about the project to the Deaf community.

The interviews were done in spoken English, American Sign Language (ASL) and tactile sign language and recorded in broadcast-quality HD video format with .wav audio back-up. A master copy of each interview was maintained as recorded. For accessibility purposes, ASL and tactile sign language interviews were translated by Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf-certified interpreters using free translation to provide an English version of ASL interview content. The translations were then used to add voiceovers to ASL and tactile sign language interviews and all interviews were transcribed.

Transcribing was done to oral history standards as described in the Baylor Institute for Oral History “Transcribing Style Guide” and the Minnesota Historical Society’s “Transcribing, Editing and Processing Guidelines.” Decisions specific to the Deaf community included discussions with commission staff about the terms *deaf* and *Deaf*—*deaf* was recognized as a generic term and *Deaf* was used to indicate culture and community. *Sign* was recognized as a verb and a language—when it indicated language, the acronym [ASL] was inserted in brackets.

The interpreters also reviewed project interviews recorded and translated in the past two decades and inserted comments on subtle changes that help illustrate on-the-spot and after-the-fact translating techniques.

This video collection is made accessible through American Sign Language (ASL), open captions, voiceovers and Microsoft Word transcripts of audio content with video descriptions included. The transcripts also include interview and translation notes (with additional information and corrections). All materials are available through the Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind, and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans, St. Paul, Minn., <http://www.mncdhh.org/heritage/>. Project materials also will be included in the Minnesota Historical Society’s collections pertaining to the commission.

Here are some examples of interviews and access for deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing interviewees:

Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans Oral-Visual History Project

Barbara Schmidt, Deaf Advocate

Recorded in American Sign Language

Barbara Schmidt (voiced by Patty Gordon): BCS

Teika Pakalns (voiced by Evonne Bilotta-Burke): TP

June 7, 2011

Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans, St. Paul, Minn.

I have been a member of Bread of Life Lutheran Church for the Deaf since 1957. The church itself was established in 1956 and I became a member the next year. ... [I] worked as the secretary for the church for years and years—just basically keeping it running. Then, as for the Deaf Hospice program, really it was ... a hearing woman, who started it. Her parents were in Hospice. [She] herself, was losing her hearing and started to study sign language ... [and] began to think about how Deaf people would possibly interact with the doctors and the people in the Hospice system. ... [A]fter some discussion, [she] decided to ... establish a system for Deaf people to access Hospice. She ... called me for help. Oh, I grilled her on that TTY [TeleTYpewriter]—asking her what this was about, what she wanted help with. The printout of that conversation is so long and she still has it.

Anyway, after a lot of discussion, I thought, “Well, why not?” “My husband had just passed away. It was 1998 and the Hospice started in that following year. I thought, “I have the time and no obligations at home right now.” [lost in the edit: come on board and have been with the Hospice program for the past 12 years.]

TP: I’ve noticed the sign you use for “Hospice.” Can you tell me how that sign, how it got started?

BCS: At first we used a sign that was based on the ASL sign for “help.” But I read a poem that made me re-think the sign we were using. So I talked it over with some of the other Deaf people involved in the team and we changed the sign to the one we use now—on the shoulder. I’ll sign that poem for you now. “Blessed are you—” Oh—I’ll be doing it in ASL, which is different than the English, OK?

“Blessed are you if you can minister to others with a heart that feels, with a heart that hurts, with a heart that loves. And blessed are you if you can minister to others with a heart that serves, with a heart that sees the need.”

So the idea of this coming from the heart led us to move the sign to over the heart, and that’s what we’ve used ever since. But when we teach workshops in other states, we let them know they have a right to create their own sign. This is just the one we use here in Minnesota.

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Barb Sommer accepting the Minnesota Book Award.



Editor’s Note: The term “deafblind” refers to people with combined vision and hearing loss. When capitalized, “Deaf” and “DeafBlind” refer to people who self-identify as sharing a particular language and culture. This story uses these terms to be consistent with the preferred language used by the project’s sponsors.

Project focused on taking alien property

ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS sometimes lurk in obscure places.

Just ask OHA past president Mehmed Ali, who described at an OHA conference session last year in Cleveland a project he undertook some 15 years ago that was sparked by his family history.

Ali's Great-Uncle James Markham served in the federal Office of Alien Property Custodian, first as deputy custodian and then head custodian from 1942 to 1946. The office was created under the Trading with the Enemy Act of 1917, after the U.S. entered World War I. It was responsible for finding and seizing enemy assets held within U.S. borders, which usually was accomplished by turning stock ownership over to the federal government, Ali said.

From the earliest days, the office faced challenges.

During the administration of President Warren G. Harding, for example, the office's second custodian, Thomas Miller, was convicted and sent to prison for taking bribes for the sale of German patents to people connected with the attorney general, Ali said.

Ali decided he wanted to bolster the official archival record of the agency during World War II and thereafter, beyond what he knew about Great-Uncle James.

To find people who had worked in the office during the war years, he obtained a 1943 personnel list and matched people to names he found on the online directory Switchboard.com. Ali said he sent about 60 "cold letters"

and hit pay dirt with a reply from a Malcom Mason, who responded with a seven-page letter.

Ali said that after numerous communications with Mason, the retired agency worker introduced him to others and invited him to attend the annual alien property office reunion in Washington, D.C. From those contacts, he eventually conducted about 25 interviews.

The interviews revealed bureaucratic tensions within the agency, Ali said, largely between older ethnic Catholic conservative Democrats and younger Jewish progressive Democrats, with varying perspectives on the mission of the alien property office.

And while Ali said the interviews were fully transcribed, they were



Alien Property Custodian Executive Staff, 1918.

never used publicly in any way. Most of the people he interviewed are now deceased, which he said has raised questions in his mind about the principles that should guide the relationship between interviewers and narrators.

"Is there an obligation," he asked, "to ensure that the content created through the interviews is given back to those who shared it through some completed and public product?" ❖

Timuel Black Street named in Chicago

NEXT TIME YOU'RE in Chicago, head over to State Street between 49th and 50th streets and you'll find the block adjacent to DuSable High School renamed in honor of longtime OHA member Timuel Black, a retired teacher, historian, author and civil rights activist recently honored by the city he calls home.

Black, a graduate of DuSable, was recognized for his contributions to the city in an honorary street-naming ceremony in January. He also received the city's first Champion of Freedom Award from Mayor Rahm Emanuel at the city's annual interfaith breakfast. ❖



PHOTO: ANTONIO PEREZ, CHICAGO TRIBUNE 1/18/13.

Chicago historian and educator Timuel Black Jr. is presented with an honorary street sign by Ald. Pat Dowell, and Mayor Rahm Emanuel at the 27th annual interfaith breakfast honoring the life of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. U.S. Senator Dick Durbin joins them on the podium.

Canadian scholar wins national honor

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH Columbia professor Julie Cruikshank has been named to the Order of Canada, that nation's highest civilian honor, for her lifetime's work in preserving indigenous history.

Cruikshank, an anthropologist, has devoted much of her career to work in the Yukon, where she first went to record oral histories for Canada's Royal Commission on the Status of Women. She has since interviewed countless Athapaskan and Tlingit elders to record their life stories.

The Globe and Mail in Toronto reported that her recent work has uncovered threads from the past that tie to the future. She has collected aboriginal stories of glaciers during the Little Ice Age, for example, that provide "valuable insights into climate conditions and the environment in a changing region of our rapidly warming world," the Globe and Mail said. ❖



Julie Cruikshank

Minnesota deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing activism

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Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans Oral-Visual History Project

Interview with Lynette Boyer, DeafBlind Advocate

Teika Pakalns, Interviewer

Recorded in American Sign Language and tactile sign language

Alan Kenney, Tactile Interpreter

Patty Gordon and Cori Giles, Sign Language Interpreters

Lynette Boyer (voiced by Patty Gordon): LB

Teika Pakalns (voiced by Evonne Bilotta-Burke): TP

June 8, 2011

Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans, St. Paul, Minn.

...in 2002 I was involved with DeafBlind Services of Minnesota, DBSM. Right, right. We were working on a project called Bridging Hands Together. The focus was bringing Deaf people and DeafBlind people together. We were working together looking for support. We were doing some fundraising. At one event, I made this Italian spaghetti sauce and another woman brought in this big pot of food. We were raising money for a DeafBlind camp. We raised \$400 one night. That was big money. ... [But] there were so many things I just couldn't do. I finally said I just wanted to go to the Legislature and testify. ... I was really excited to testify on behalf of DBSM. ... I was with an interpreter—I can't remember who—but anyway, there I was at the committee hearing. I was called to testify. I got right up there. I said "hello" to each one of the legislators and I said, "I am here to tell you the truth." Well, that got their attention. I explained everything—how DeafBlind people need SSP [Support Service Provider] services, just how critical it is to have SSPs for us to be able to interact fully and safely in the community. ... I can't remember all I said. But when I was done, I thanked them all and sat back. ... We got big money out of that one. Oh, man, I can't even remember how much it was.

Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans Oral-Visual History Project

Richard "Rich" Diedrichsen, Hard of Hearing Advocate

Recorded in spoken English

Rich Diedrichsen: RD

Barbara W. Sommer: BWS

June 8, 2011

Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans, St. Paul, Minn.

For people that are hard of hearing, the way this [sense of separateness] played into who we were and who we became—and there's a lot of denial in hearing loss—in fact, I'm a champion of saying in my training—other than chemical dependency, I can't think of any limitation that has a greater rate of denial. But keep in mind, for people that are hard of hearing, we didn't have that Deaf culture. We didn't have that

language. We didn't have that identity. One of the things I think people that are hard of hearing need to be indebted to the Deaf community for, is showing us that by having that, you can create a sense of acceptance for yourself. Most people who were hard of hearing ... were kind of stuck between the worlds. I know that's become a commonplace description but, in a real sense, even for myself ..., I wasn't fluent enough in sign language that I could really fit into the Deaf community. Deaf culture was not my identity. So even though I did a lot of things with the Deaf community ..., I wasn't in a true sense a culturally Deaf person. At the same time, when I would interact with people that had normal hearing, I missed enough things—... It's like—OK, I don't fit into this community, I don't fit into this community—please tell me where I belong. ❖

Acknowledgements and Credits

Thanks to the interviewees who agreed to participate in this exciting project and share their stories of advocacy. Special thanks also go to the organizations that produced and contributed materials for this project, including the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Metro Division of the Minnesota Department of Human Services, Digiterp Communications, the Minnesota Association of Deaf Citizens, the Minnesota Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and the St. Paul Neighborhood Network. The final videos were produced and re-mastered by ZenMation for the Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans.

This project was made possible by Legacy funding granted to the commission from the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund established by the vote of Minnesotans on Nov. 4, 2008, and administered by the Minnesota Historical Society.

For more information, contact Barb Sommer, BWS Associates (www.barbarawsommer.com), or Mary Hartnett, Executive Director, Minnesota Commission of Deaf, DeafBlind and Hard of Hearing Minnesotans (<http://www.mncdhh.org/about-us/211/directory-new>).



Example of photo from the MNCDDH collection in the Minnesota Digital Library's online "Minnesota Reflections" collection: Deaf students fingerspelling "I love Miss Buxton" with teacher Ruth Buxton. 1892-1893.

Summer Workshops

“Catching Stories” is theme of Ohio summer institute

IF YOU ARE doing an oral history project or are thinking about doing one, you should apply to attend this year’s Oral History Institute, June 4-6 on the beautiful campus of Kenyon College in Gambier, Ohio. The program trains participants in planning and conducting successful oral history projects.

Emphasizing hands-on experience, topics covered in the two-and-a-half-day schedule include interviewing techniques, transcribing and archiving and devising public programs based on oral history. To develop these skills, participants will work on a practice project that encompasses all stages of oral history and will also have time to consult with experts about planned

projects. Sessions will also be available on using technology in oral history and on fundraising.

The faculty consists of professors from the fields of history, sociology, archiving and journalism who all have extensive experience with oral history.

We encourage volunteers or paid staff from local historical organizations, libraries, schools and colleges and universities to apply. Admission to the institute is limited to 30 and is competitive. The cost of the institute is \$300, which includes two nights stay, six meals and all other workshop materials.

To obtain an application, visit our website at <http://www.ohiohumanities.org/programs/oral-history-institute.html> or contact James Calder at (800)



Kenyon College

293-9774 or <mailto:jimc@ohiohumanities.org>. The application deadline is April 29.

The Oral History Institute is co-sponsored by the Ohio Humanities Council and the Rural Life Center at Kenyon College. ❖

ROHO postpones summer institute

THE BANCROFT LIBRARY’S Regional Oral History Office at the University of California Berkeley is postponing until 2014 its annual Advanced Oral History Institute. In an announcement on its website, ROHO said staff members have been studying new recording, editing and presentation technologies. “This has led our historians to rethink the content and structure of our institute so that it will continue to be at the forefront of oral history theory and practice for years to come,” the announcement said. It encouraged interested oral historians to await information on next year’s institute. ❖

Summer oral history field school offered in Egypt

STUDENTS ARE INVITED to participate in the second annual summer oral history field school in Egypt from May 20-June 9. Students will learn about the Egyptian Revolution through hands-on oral history work. The three-week study tour includes daily classes as well as visits to Cairo, Luxor, Alexandria, the western desert and the Red Sea.

Cost of the course is \$3,602, excluding airfare, and financial aid is possible. Students will receive four credits, including one hour of service learning. If you’re interested, contact Heidi Morrison, assistant professor of history, University of Wisconsin, La Crosse, at: hmorrison@uwlax.edu ❖



Cairo, Egypt

Columbia University summer institute focuses on indigenous narratives

THE COLUMBIA CENTER for Oral History’s annual summer institute will focus this year on the theme “Telling the World: Indigenous Memories, Rights and Narratives.” The institute is scheduled for June 10-21 in New York City.

Sessions will explore the themes of indigenous memories, narratives and rights through local and global perspectives. Faculty will include experts on American Indian life as well as indigenous cultures from Canada, New Zealand and other areas of the world. The institute will focus on traditions of telling and ways of knowing in primarily oral cultures. Students, scholars and activists from local and global communities are encouraged to apply. ❖



The Columbia Center for Oral History

high school-public radio partnership

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The Uni High Oral History Project

That's the scene during one of the focal points of the Uni High Oral History Project: the interview.

At University Laboratory High School, the Oral History Project has been around for almost 20 years. It's a unique partnership between the high school social studies department and the University of Illinois' public radio station WILL AM 580. Through the duration of the relationship, Uni High students have produced 19 radio documentaries that share the oral histories of the local Champaign-Urbana community.



PHOTO: UNI HIGH SCHOOL

Uni High students, from left to right, Shrutti Vaidya, Sarah Yockey and Aishwarya Gautam, produced the school's recent radio documentary on counterculture in Champaign-Urbana, Ill.

The oral history projects have been a key feature of the Uni social studies curriculum since 1993, when a pilot project was launched by Barbara Wysocki, then department head and teacher of eighth grade or "sub-freshman" social studies at the five-year public laboratory school. At Uni, these youngest of students, 12- to 14-year olds, are known as "subbies."

Each oral history project is led by a Uni history teacher and a partner from WILL who spend a semester each year teaching subbies both the background history for their topic and the skills required to generate good oral histories. A team of high school interns led by senior student producers conduct the rest of the project, from choosing the topic and interviewees to the technical editing and production of a ready-to-air piece for radio.

The program has evolved over time, both with new producers and updated technologies. Each oral history project now takes about two calendar years to complete from start to finish. The process involves the entire subfreshman class of 60-some students, along with approximately 20 high school-aged interns and two to four student producers, which is about 25 percent of the students at Uni.

Past and present projects

The oral history program at Uni has taken on numerous topics, but most projects relate to specific historical movements or the experiences of a part of the population. Importantly, they all look at how the stories of people living in Champaign-Urbana and the East Central Illinois area fit into the broader national story.

The first project, "Covering Our Memories," in 1994, looked into the lives and stories of African-American quil-

ters in the area. The second was a collection of stories about Holocaust survivors. Other early projects presented the experiences of World War II prisoners of war and local farmers.

As the oral history program grew, the topics increased in complexity. The 2006 project, which won a "National Communicators" broadcasting award, was called "The 20th Century Exodus: The Triumphant Life and Journey of the Jewish in Our Community," a title reflecting the range and depth of issues that it covered. In recent years, projects have focused on issues of social justice and efforts to expand the rights of specific groups within American society.

Topics are selected through discussions among the student producers and the WILL and Uni faculty sponsors. Each must be broad enough to fulfill the objectives of the history curriculum, and focused enough to produce a 60-minute radio documentary that will appeal to local audiences. Finding something all parties agree on is no small task, but the interests of the student producers are key, as they will devote countless extracurricular hours to carrying out their project.

The interview

The interview is at the core of the oral history project. Listening to first-hand accounts and experiences brings to life what students learn in the classroom. Since interviews are the building blocks of a good documentary, a lot of work goes into making sure this time is spent effectively.

In class, sub-freshmen study the historical context of their project. For example, during the gender equity project the students read about and discussed the history of the women's rights movement from the 1848 Seneca Falls convention to issues of modern feminism. This gives them a basic idea of chronology, as well as a better sense of the broader historical context of each interviewee's experiences.

To help students be attuned to likely points of reference, each team is asked to prepare a set of parallel timelines that trace key milestones in the life of their assigned interviewee while connecting them to relevant developments in the larger context (e.g., wars, legislation, social movements, etc.). Using those timelines, subbies then prepare open-ended interview questions that help situate the interviewee within a specific context, for example: "We understand that you entered the University of Illinois in 1967. What was the atmosphere on campus like at that time?"

Interviews are conducted after hours in the WILL radio studios. Most are between one and two hours long and generally follow a chronological structure to ensure that key points in the interviewee's experiences are explored in depth in an organized fashion. While they may not cover every chapter of an interviewee's life, addressing each relevant part of his or her experiences in this way encourages interviewees to recall experiences in detail. This also makes it easier for their young interviewers to envision the context and ask good follow-up questions. It is these questions that often elicit the best stories and the personal details that make oral history so compelling.

After the hours of preparation, students are often surprised at how easy it is to connect with their interviewee. They marvel at how quickly the time passes when they are caught up in dialogue. And they are often amazed by how much they learned from simply asking questions and listening carefully to the stories of a person whose connections to other times and places now feel quite tangible to them as well.

One student observed at the end of the year: "This oral history project has been the most enlightening project I have

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Fall conference to explore hidden stories

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metropolitan center among the Plains States of Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska and the Dakotas. It is a place where the distinctive regional influences of the South and Midwest mix with the conventions of the American West.

Our conference hotel, the absolutely grand and recently renovated Skirvin, originally opened in 1911 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It stands in the heart of a downtown that has undergone a dramatic renaissance in the past 20 years centered on a revitalized river district. The local arrangements committee is hard at work planning activities that will allow us to know and enjoy OKC more deeply.

The association's annual Thursday evening presidential reception will take place at the stunning new Oklahoma History Center. **Bob Blackburn**, executive director of the Oklahoma Historical Society, will provide a short introduction to Oklahoma history. The featured entertainment of the evening will be a quintet performance under the direction of composer **Scott McAllister**. The piece, *Polango*, is inspired by oral histories McAllister conducted exploring the music and the lives of Appalachian coal miners of central Pennsylvania.

Friday afternoon's luncheon speaker will be journalist **Wade Goodwyn**. (Whether or not you recognize his name, you will immediately recognize his voice.) Goodwyn, a National Public Radio National Desk correspondent covering Texas and the surrounding states, is also the son of renowned historian and oral historian Larry Goodwyn. Wade Goodwyn has covered a wide range of issues from politics and music to breaking news and crime and punishment. His reports have ranged from weather calamities, religion and corruption, to immigration, obituaries, business and high-profile court cases.

Historian **Ed Linenthal** is the featured speaker at our Friday evening special event at the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum. One of the leading historians of



Oklahoma Historical Society.

American historical memory and memorialization and the editor of the *Journal of American History*, Linenthal will return to many of the issues that concerned him in researching and writing his 2003 book, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory*, in his address. The museum and memorial site will remain open after hours so that OHA attendees may tour the site before and after Linenthal's presentation.

Storyteller, recording artist and author **Dovie Thomason** will provide the keynote performance at Saturday evening's OHA awards dinner. Thomason has been a featured teller at major festivals and has had extended engagements at the Smithsonian's Discovery Theater, Wolf Trap, the Kennedy Center, and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation Poetry Festival. Thomason is Lakota/Kiowa Apache and has received the Parents' Choice Gold Award, Storytelling World Honors Award, the Audiofile Award and the American Library Association/Booklist Editor's Choice Award for her recordings of traditional Native stories.

Plenary sessions will delve into such diverse topics as using oral history to explore American foodways, issues common to the international practice of oral history with first peoples and a project documenting the lives of the members of circus communities in Hugo, Okla.

Wednesday and Saturday workshops will provide professional development options for all levels of practitioners. We will have a diverse offering available in Oklahoma City, including Introduction to Oral History, Oral History and IRBs, Oral History and the Law, Oral History Transcripts as Performance Texts, Using Multimedia in Writing with Oral History, and Oral History and Digital Preservation.

Our all-day Saturday teachers' workshop, led by **Michael Frisch and the 198 String Band**, is titled "Folk Music and Oral History, Folk Music AS Oral History: Teaching with Folk Music, Photographs and Voices from the Depression."

Online registration will be available beginning in June, and the OHA website (<http://www.oralhistory.org/>) will provide full details, including housing arrangements, transportation choices and fees for attendance at regular and special events and workshops. We look forward to seeing you in October. ❖



Skirvin Hotel lobby courtesy of Ira Montgomery Photography.

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ever experienced in my school career. Learning is so much easier when it occurs verbally.” Or as another student put it in a thank-you note to her interviewee, “When history textbooks just talk about big events, they make history seem distant. Your story had the little details that make it seem personal, and you told it in an enjoyable, humorous, yet moving way. You made it seem real. Thank you for taking me [there]. Thank you for letting me listen.”

Production

After the interviews comes the magic. Or rather, the years of hard work to make what seems like an effortlessly put together documentary. The producers are tasked with the process of taking oral histories and figuring out how to piece them together to create a radio documentary that listeners can appreciate. Senior student producers Sarah, Aishwarya and Shruti recall a turning point in the process of producing the recent documentary on counterculture:

It was nine o'clock in the evening, and we were exhausted—quite unusual for three high school seniors during winter break. We had spent over a day and a half working on the documentary script, which was finally taking shape. Cutting up the stories that our interns had chosen, we argued among ourselves, discussing the merits of one story over another, rearranging blocks of text, trying to piece together a cohesive narrative. And finally, we succeeded.

Leaning back on the couch we surveyed the damage. The living room was a disaster: papers, binders and history books were spread out everywhere, not to mention a few stray crumbs of gingerbread cookies. A white board was covered in a scribbled outline. And over in the corner was the first draft of a radio script, in the form of somewhat misshapen paper blocks, held together with scotch tape, stretching the length of the carpet. The scattered stories had literally been pieced together into a bigger narrative, the product of our now-famous “lock-in.”

Clearly, a lot of work happened before the lock-in, which occurred halfway through our second year in the project. Even before subbies get the names of their interviewees, the producers and their team of interns have been working for months, searching for those interviewees. Sound easy? It wasn't.

We gathered information, asking anyone and everyone we knew to give us names, and arranging times to meet them. We conducted preliminary interviews late at night to accommodate ER doctors. We sent our team of interns out in pairs to talk to people we had never spoken to. We sweet-talked reluctant interviewees, heard lots of interesting (but sometimes irrelevant) stories, and occasionally had our requests refused. Our faculty advisor, Janet Morford, even dragged her family to a Mexican restaurant that a man we were trying to track down was said to visit frequently! For months, we dedicated ourselves to the task of finding quality interviewees.

After we finished the difficult job of narrowing down the list, we turned the task over, momentarily, to the subfreshmen. Team by team, they dressed up and went to our local radio station to spend two hours in a soundproof recording studio discussing what it was like in our community during the counterculture era, asking carefully chosen questions, hoping to gain real perspective into their interviewees' lives.

During the spring of 2011, we received the final interviews, carefully transcribed by the subbies. As a team, we read through everything and organized all the best material in a system of close to 30 Google documents, accessible to and edited by the whole intern team. Then, we looked at the documents we had amassed. Quite simply, we were perplexed. We were not prepared for the reality of just how much good material we had. That's when we realized we needed to attempt to reduce the massive amount of material. Our solution? The lock-in.

Even with a draft of the script in hand, there were revisions to make and hours of technical audio editing to be done. That's when

we began to frequent the WILL studio almost every day. We worked on fitting the individual parts of the script together—narration, blocks of interviews and music. We remember an online chat where we were all trying to figure out how to transition from a story about counterculture music and Bob Marley to a new section about drug use in the era. Aishwarya did a quick search resulting in a link to a song called “Pass the Marijuana” by a reggae group that sounds similar to Bob Marley. It was the perfect transition. However, the song was so catchy that Aishwarya confessed to innocently singing it in front of her father, much to his confusion and bemusement.

For producers working with deadlines, the editing process was more a management challenge than anything else. Scheduling the interns so that each one could go in for two hours a week, to work on one computer, was a difficult task. We taught our team that when you sat down at the WILL computer designated for project use, the first thing you grabbed was a simple, three-ringed binder. This binder contained essentially everything you needed to do your job for the day, whether it was rough cuts, volume editing or something else. It allowed the producers to communicate with the interns and have specific instructions to make things run more smoothly.

There are so many components of producing a documentary that we can't explain them all. Like any team of fellow travelers, we have our share of inside jokes and cherished memories.

But the lock-in tops the list of special moments—one that you point to and remember with fondness because the memory of complete exhaustion had been wiped away by the proud ability to proclaim, “This is oral history, and I'm a part of it.” For us, that was what the whole idea of creating a piece of oral history was about: linking the stories of people whose lives were connected in ways that we could only see after reading through them, carefully cutting the blocks of stories apart, and then piecing them back together again. Looking back, we realize how difficult it can be to listen—to really listen to a story or an experience and make an effort to understand what it must have been like without actually having been there. But when you manage to do it, the rewards are immense.

The Impact

Although producing a radio documentary is a long and labor-intensive process, the impact that it has on students as novice interviewers and especially as interns and producers makes it well worth the effort.

“My internship at WILL honestly shaped me more than any other single activity I can think of,” observed Maritza Mestre, a 2010 Uni alumna and co-producer of radio documentaries on technology and invention, gender equity and the history of the Asian-American community in East-Central Illinois. “I poured my heart into those projects, and I always loved the part of the process when you knew the program so well you could recite it without hearing the audio. They just become a part of you. I still to this day think back to specific interviews in relation to something new I learn or experience. ... My favorite part of the program is always at the end when you can hear the program all together. It would always wow me. Hearing it on the radio—that just made it even more surreal. After numerous challenges and hours beyond hours of work, finally hearing the final product kind of felt like holding a newborn child in your arms.”

For some students, it is the privilege of hearing people's stories over and over that stays with them. “Working with oral history is unique,” observed former intern Katherine Floess. “Not only are you recording someone's personal history, but you are capturing a person telling that story in their own voice. The voice choking with emotion, telling a per-

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sonal anecdote, laughing—that’s as much a part of the story as the words. When producing the oral history project, you feel a huge debt to your interviewees, as you are holding their life story in your hands.” Floess, co-producer of a 2011 documentary on efforts to make the University of Illinois accessible to people with physical disabilities, is now a student at Columbia University, drawn there in part through its Center for Oral History.

Uni students have often taken their experience with oral history and radio and applied it to other pursuits. Some students have conducted their own oral history projects in college or graduate school, and others have gone into journalism or radio. Class of 1999 alum Jeremy Hobson, who was among the first Uni High students to participate in the partnership with WILL, is now a regular on National Public Radio as he produces the “Marketplace Morning Report” each day.

Beyond the students, the documentaries affect the local community as well. Interviewees are often delighted to hear how their own stories have become part of a larger narrative. “I tuned in to the documentary which aired Saturday evening,” wrote one interviewee. “How impressive! You did such a marvelous job of bringing that era alive for me again and for anyone else who was listening. I so admire the hard work and ingenuity that went into making this project such a wonderful contribution to the historical record of the Champaign-Urbana community.”

Other listeners emphasize how surprising but rewarding it is to learn about their own past from the work of a younger generation. “For me, the documentary brought back some old memories, corrected some others, and put them all into greater perspective.... It’s astounding that a group of high school students could do such an outstanding and comprehensive job of reviving and teaching me so much about a period of history that I lived through long before they were born.”

The educational value of the documentaries—for the audiences as well as the students—is widely acknowledged. In response to the documentary on counterculture, another community member offered this assessment. “I really enjoyed listening tonight and was very impressed... It was so polished, interesting and rich in learning AND teaching... I think the education goes so much further than just the kids in the school. I learned a lot by listening and rethinking some of the songs and interviews in a timeline and on a local level. We always ‘hear’ things so differently depending on when and where we are in life and it is a good reminder to look back on things with new eyes (or ears in this circumstance). The Uni students are definitely learning, but they are also teaching the listening public. We are an audience that is genuinely interested as it applies to OUR community’s citizens and history.”

And that’s the point: teaching students and engaging listeners, all while preserving the experiences and stories of our community members as oral history. ❖

To learn more about the Uni High-WILL oral history partnership, explore these links:

<http://will.illinois.edu/community/unihighdocumentaries/>

<http://illinoisyouthmedia.org/main/organization/uni-high>

<http://www.uni.illinois.edu/og/features/2010/12/discovering-past-history-oral-his>



Power and Democracy: The Many Voices of Oral History

XVIIIth International Oral History Association | Barcelona, Spain | July 9-12, 2014

THE INTERNATIONAL ORAL History Association will hold its next meeting in Spain at the University of Barcelona, July 9-12, 2014 (master classes will be held on July 8). Its theme will be “Power and Democracy.”

The force of democracy as well as the resistance it has met have prompted oral history projects around the world. Interviews with advocates of change have supplemented and supplanted archives of discredited regimes. Oral histories have documented social and political upheavals, reform movements and reactions. Oral histories have revealed the effects of power relationships that exist between citizens and their governments, workers and employers, students and teachers, and the layers within institutions, communities and families. As a democratic tool, oral history records and preserves the memories, perceptions and voices of individuals and groups at all levels and in all endeavors, but that raises questions about what to do with these interviews and how to share them with the people and communities they reflect.

Sub-themes of the Barcelona IOHA conference

- Archives, Oral Sources and Remembrance
- Power in Human Relations
- Democracy as a Political Tool
- Oral Sources and Cultural Heritage
- New Ways to Share Our Dialogue with the Public

If you are interested in participating, send a single-page proposal including an outline of your paper and the following details:

1. Name (family name in CAPITAL letters).
2. Affiliation
3. Postal address
4. Email address
5. Phone and fax numbers
6. Relevant sub-theme
7. Whether an individual paper, a thematic panel, a workshop proposal or a performance
8. Suggestions for Special Interest Groups

THE DEADLINE FOR PROPOSALS IS SEPT. 15, 2013

SEND PROPOSALS TO:

Spanish-language

Carles Santacana: historiaoral.barcelona2014@ub.edu

English-language

Don Ritchie: iohabarcelona2014@gmail.com

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Do you have colleagues who use oral history in their classrooms? Or in their ongoing research projects?

Do you know of community groups exploring the use of oral history to document their work? Or local museums eager to engage area residents?

Chances are you do. And there's also a chance those people are not members of the Oral History Association. But you can fix that. Share this **Newsletter** with them. Brag about the *Oral History Review* online. Tell them about the workshops and thought-provoking sessions and like-minded new friends they'll find at an OHA conference.

And then encourage them to join OHA. They'll be glad they did.

Visit www.oralhistory.org for more information