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ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

From Analog to Digital: The Smithsonian Institution Archives Digital Preservation Initiative

By Pamela Henson, Smithsonian Institution

Analog tape is going the way of the horse and buggy — soon it will not be available for sale and, more importantly, analog tape playback machines will be museum artifacts. Oral history programs are now recording digitally. But what about those wonderful interviews recorded in the 1960s and 1970s? What can you do to ensure that they can be used in the coming decades?

The Smithsonian Institution Archives Oral History Program is slowly, but surely, carrying out a Digital Preservation Initiative to ensure that our audiotape and videotape interviews will be accessible in the 21st century. We are concerned also about our paper transcripts and digital text files in old word-processing pro-

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PHOTO BY DOUGLAS LAMBERT

Oral History Association past president Charlie Hardy (left) and President Michael Frisch entertain themselves and conference-goers at an informal musicale. For the more than 300 people who attended the Oral History Association’s annual conference in Louisville, Ky., Oct. 14-18, the event was a showcase for Kentucky community oral historians as well as for presenters whose work has taken them around the world.

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OHA accomplishments to report

The new OHA president takes office on the last morning of the annual meeting, and the deadline for preparing her or his first **OHA Newsletter** column is shortly thereafter. So the first column is written in the glow of open-ended possibility, before any hard presidential leadership work has begun. This is only one of the clever ways OHA has set things up to assure sincerity as I begin by saying what a pleasure it is to greet **Newsletter** readers, for the first time, under the president's byline.

A more elaborate built-in guarantee is the OHA practice of assigning annual meeting planning, organizing and fundraising to the president-elect. Taking office at the very moment the meeting is finally over and all that work just about done means that beginning service as president can only seem a relief, almost a vacation.

When the meeting has been as successful, energetic and productive as our Louisville gathering, the pleasure is heightened. "Moving Beyond the Interview," the theme developed by program co-chairs Alicia Rouverol and Mark Tebeau with the invaluable input of local arrangements chair Tracy K'Meyer, conveyed the many rapidly expanding ways, so richly illustrated in Kentucky work, in which oral history is being used for community, educational, scholarly and public purposes. In this respect, the meeting suggested a shifting center of gravity in the field as a whole, assisted by but not limited to or defined by the role of digitization, the Internet and other new modes of engagement and use.

Mark, Alicia, Tracy and I were especially pleased with how the plenary events — from the opening Studs Terkel event to the Saturday evening Appalshop presentation, with the Community Commons, Jack Tchen's MoCA commentary, Caroline Knowles' flip flops, Shannon Flattery's Touchable Stories and Marie Garlock's Tanzania performance in-between — functioned far beyond our expectations, like tent poles raising a canopy-like space under which the rich menu of individual sessions could become a coherent whole. This was consolidated by the strikingly successful Sunday morning Synthesis Sessions, an innovation we hope is developed further in coming years.

A number of initiatives and developments moving forward from the Louisville meeting will be important in OHA work, and my own leadership, throughout the next months.

Annual meeting business meetings often are routine, but this year's was not. Following several years of task force work led by Tracy K'Meyer, we adopted a new statement of General Principles and Best Practices for Oral History, replacing the previous Evaluation Guidelines. The intent was to provide a simpler set of very basic principles, useful for design of new projects and especially for dealing with IRBs.

Electronic communication means that no such document need to be considered carved in stone. At the business meeting, I suggested shifting our metaphor for thinking about such things from publishing (first edition, second edition, etc.) to software. Consider the new guidelines to be version 3.00. Having "beta-tested" it among ourselves, we now release it not because it is final or perfect, but so that it can be opened up to a far wider range of users than any planning group could include. As with all software releases, gaps or problems will be discovered as people use the tool, and there will be many suggestions for revision and refinement. This will make possible more fluid, sequential updates (version 3.01, 3.02, etc), for which we will need a process and a basis for deciding when proposed changes are so significant as to suggest the need for a more deliberate version 4.00.

The new Principles and Best Practices are now on our Web site, www.oralhistory.org, and I urge everyone to take advantage of the Web site for discussion so that work with the new document can inform, and be informed by, the broad participation of oral history practitioners. We will be developing and posting suggestions on how to leverage the Web site to support a focused, growing discussion of the Principles in practice.

More generally, I want to work with Margie McLellan and her new Web site advisory committee to increase use of the OHA Web site. This is somewhat of a new world for all of us, and right now we have a handsome site with some spiffy features — the Wiki, social network, Facebook page, etc. But they are largely unused. The OHA Council at its Louisville meeting felt strongly that to build broader capacity and familiarity, we ought to get as much OHA business as possible into the Web-based mode and provide as much guidance as possible in making the Web site's features used. With some pump-priming models and examples, we think the site will begin to live up to its potential as a lively, interactive, virtual oral history community.

I'll conclude my initial president's column with two notes for follow-up in the next **Newsletter** and on the Web site.

The first is some exciting good news. Michigan State University's Matrix project has written and received a substantial, prestigious Institute of Museum and Library Services national leadership grant to help crystallize a national dialogue and to frame best practices for "Oral History in the Digital Age," in informal conjunction with the Library of Congress' American Folklife Center and the Oral History Association, among others. Though not officially involved, OHA leadership will be included *ex officio*, as we have a significant stake in the work of such a project. Look for more detail and a fuller report as this ambitious project begins to take shape.

The second involves some very sad news, which many readers will already have received and is reported elsewhere in this issue: the passing of Brother Blue, aka Dr. Hugh Morgan Hill, 88 — storyteller extraordinaire, official storyteller of Boston and Cambridge and a wonderful presence at every OHA meeting until Louisville, as far back as I can remember. This is a loss many of us feel personally and that our community and the whole storytelling world will feel very substantially. It's stunning and sobering: Studs Terkel, Archie Green, Sandy Ives and now Brother Blue, all gone within one sad year, a generational sea-change in oral history and far beyond.

Our deep collective condolences to Ruth Edmonds Hill, Blue's life partner and constant companion at every OHA meeting. We hope she will be able to join us for an appreciation that will be a major feature of next year's Atlanta meeting and in other forums and formats to be developed. In the meantime, beyond the many obituary tributes a Google search will lead to, those saddened by the loss may find it comforting, as I have, to spend some time with Brother Blue's Web site, www.brotherblue.com, where his unique spirit and energy shine through. ❖



OHA president, Michael Frisch

OHA members approve new “best practices” at annual meeting in Louisville

Following a lively discussion, OHA members at a sparsely attended Sunday morning annual meeting approved a new “Principles and Best Practices for Oral History.” About 40 people were at the meeting, not all of them members.

Prepared by a task force headed by Tracy K’Meyer, the document articulates ethical principles for conducting oral history interviews and outlines basic steps in the oral history process. The OHA’s guidelines were last revised in 1998.

K’Meyer described the process by which her task force sought comments from folklore, anthropology and history groups, invited comments online and through the **OHA Newsletter**, held an open forum at last year’s OHA conference in Pittsburgh and solicited comments from large oral history programs as well as from people who do oral history but who are not members of OHA.

She said the task force sought to simplify and shorten the guidelines and make them more accessible.

Several OHA members, noting the sparse attendance at the meeting, argued that the proposed revisions were being offered for approval without sufficient public discussion and suggested that the proposed guidelines be considered a provisional draft.

Incoming president Michael Frisch discouraged that approach, saying there was “enormous need” to have updated guidelines that campus-based oral historians could give to institutional review boards when they seek approval for oral history projects. A provisional draft would not meet that need, he said.

Frisch suggested the development of new guidelines was analogous to developing computer software, which is constantly updated as features needing improvement emerge. The guidelines, which are on the OHA Web site, www.oralhistory.org, can be enhanced and refined as oral historians use them and identify ways to improve them, he said.

Vice President Rina Benmayor said that next year’s conference in Atlanta will feature a session for further discussion of the new guidelines after oral historians have had a chance to work with them.

In other business at the annual meeting:

- Executive Secretary Madelyn Campbell reported that the OHA Endowment has \$204,500. She said she expects the OHA to have a \$146,000 operating reserve at the end of the year. About 900 people are members of the organization, and she urged people to recruit new members.
- The International Committee reported that it awarded eight scholarships to help international presenters attend the Louisville meeting. The OHA will contribute \$3,000 to the International Oral History Association to fund scholarships for the IOHA meeting next July in Prague. OHA members who want to help with the IOHA meeting should contact Jessica Wiederhorn at jwieder@narrativetrust.org.
- The Diversity Committee reported it plans to send promotional materials to colleges and universities in the Atlanta region to encourage diverse attendance at next year’s conference.
- Campbell reported that the OHA awarded a total of \$4,300 in scholarships to 16 people, including international attendees. The Kentucky Oral History Commission also awarded six scholarships for conference attendees.
- Web site editor Marjorie McLellan urged members to participate on the OHA Web site’s interactive features that allow members to share information, ask questions and find resources dealing with technology and institutional review boards. Members interested in serving on a Web advisory board should contact McLellan at: marjorie.mclellan@wright.edu. ❖

(A complete text of the new guidelines — originally a Special Report in the Fall 2009 OHA Newsletter — is on pages 8 and 9.)

OHA appreciates sponsors

Thanks to the following organizations that generously sponsored various events at the OHA conference in Louisville:

- University at Buffalo, State University of New York, College of Arts and Sciences
- University at Buffalo, State University of New York, Office of Science, Technology and Economic Outreach/UB Tech Incubator
- Kentucky Center for the Performing Arts
- Louisville Public Media
- University of Louisville, Office of the Provost, College of Arts and Sciences
- Frazier Museum of International History
- Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky
- Institute for Oral History, Baylor University
- Boehm Biography Group
- Cleveland State University
- Oxford University Press
- University of Louisville, Department of History

grams. We plan to move to electronic reference, so we can respond to reference requests with digital recording and transcript files, and plan to place interview excerpts on the Web.

We are a large organization with more resources than many smaller projects, but we have limited funding for this program. We've sought grants, asked for help from our conservators and electronic records archivists and relied on work by interns and volunteers. Hopefully, an overview of what we have done, what standards we followed and what decisions we have made will help other projects face this challenging, but necessary, task.

We plan to move to electronic reference, so we can respond to reference requests with digital recording and transcript files, and plan to place interview excerpts on the Web.

Formats

For all of our preservation formats, our preference is open source software, that is, the software programming must be openly available so electronic records archivists will know how to access the files in the future; proprietary software is produced by companies with hidden programming not available to competitors. An archivist might not be able to crack that hidden coding. We also decided that our preservation formats have to be readily accessible and have the least compression possible, that is, the file contains as much of the data as possible, not a sampling. The advantage is fidelity; the disadvantage is file size. We also looked for formats that were cross-platform, that is, they can be read or played on Windows, Macintosh and Linux operating systems.

Transcripts

Our oldest interview transcripts, dating from the early 1970s, are typed on acid-free paper. In 1985, we began using DOS-based word-processing programs, such as WordPerfect. These early transcript files were stored on 5" floppy disks. Later transcripts were produced in Windows programs, such as Microsoft Word, and stored on 3 1/4" diskettes. We wished to convert all of our transcripts to a single preservation file format that is open source, cross-platform and readily available. Although it was once proprietary, Adobe .pdf format is now open source, cross-platform, widely available, preserves both text and formatting, and can embed images, so we chose to convert to Adobe .pdf files. We lack the resources to create and proof OCR files of our paper transcripts so for now, we are scanning the paper transcripts as image files. These will be accurate copies of the transcripts, stable and easy to share with users. However, you cannot conduct a word search in an image file, so the content is less accessible than a .pdf text file. For the early electronic files, we moved the files to the server, using an ancient 5" floppy drive and 3 1/4" diskette drive. We then used a file conversion program, called File Merlin, to convert all of the files to Rich Text Files. The .rtf files are open source, but you lose much of the formatting. We then

also converted each file to an Adobe .pdf text file — these will retain formatting but are also searchable. Out of hundreds of transcripts, only a half dozen could not be opened and need to be re-keyboarded or scanned from paper copies.

Magnetic Analog Tape

Like most collections, we have an array of tape formats and sizes. For original audiotape, we have cassettes, 3", 5" and 7" reel-to-reel tapes, recorded at different speeds, numbers of tracks, monaural and stereo, etc. For original videotapes, we have VHS, U-Matic and BetaCam cassettes and 1" open reel tapes. Our electronic records archivist recommended selecting a single standard for digitizing all the audiotapes and all the videotapes.

For audiotapes, we chose .wav files — it is an open source file, cross-platform, not compressed and widely used. Wave files can be recorded at different standards; for our preservation effort, we record 96 kHz 24 bit. Imbedded in .wav files are codecs, pieces of software that allow the .wav files to play with various programs, such as Windows Media Audio, or on specific pieces of equipment, and these can cause playback problems. We try to avoid allowing any unusual codecs within our .wav files. We then make an .mp3 file from our .wav file. The .mp3 file is proprietary and highly compressed.

However, it is a good format for reference — it is widely available, files are not too large to send to patrons and the fidelity is good enough for normal listening.

Converting our videotapes has proved more challenging than text or audio. We convert all the analog formats to motion jpeg2000 format in .mxf files, with high quality MPEG-2 files, stored as .mpg files, as an alternate, as well as Windows Media Video and Real Media copies for reference. The .mxf or Material eXchange Format files meet standards for professional digital audio and video set by the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers. MPEG-2 standards were developed by the Moving Pictures Expert Group and are an ISO standard used for digital television and DVDs. The Windows Media and Real Media formats are proprietary and compressed but widely used and thus appropriate for reference.

The equipment we used is new; we've had to iron out many procedures and encountered many problems, requiring work to be redone. The work is time consuming. We clean each tape and digitize it in real time. The equipment then processes the file, taking about half of the time of the tape to complete that task. Finally the files are written to a high density magnetic storage tape twice, so we have a duplicate copy. Windows Media and Real Media files are also placed on the server for reference. It can take two hours to convert an hour of videotape and complete quality control on it.

File storage has posed significant problems for us and will for most organizations. Hopefully, new storage media will eliminate this problem in the coming years. For audio recordings, we store files on archival quality CDs. We make two copies for each audio file, burning it as a data file to two different brands of CDs — so if one brand of CD fails, we will still have our interviews. We also copy each file to our server, which is backed up every day.

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Ritchie promoted to Senate historian

After more than 30 years as associate Senate historian, OHA past president Donald A. Ritchie became the U.S. Senate historian Sept. 1, upon the retirement of Richard Baker, who had hired Ritchie in 1976, shortly after the Senate Historical Office was created.

Ritchie, who is widely respected for his storehouse of knowledge about everything from major players in American history to Senate historical trivia, is the author of eight books, including *Doing Oral History*. Ritchie also has conducted scores of interviews for the Senate Historical Office's oral history program, which focuses on senators, veteran Senate staff members and others who have played roles in the legislative process.

Ritchie, 63, a native of Queens, N.Y., earned his bachelor's degree from City College of New York and his master's and doctorate from the University of Maryland.

He was among the first people Baker hired after the Senate established the historical office in the run-up to the nation's bicentennial celebration and in

the wake of the Watergate scandal and subsequent committee investigations, which highlighted the importance of more systematically preserving congressional records.

Baker and Ritchie pushed for a Senate resolution, eventually passed in 1980, that requires Senate records to be open to the public after 20 years. Records that deal with classified information or personal privacy concerns are open after 50 years. One later result of that resolution was to open 160 previously closed hearings conducted by Sen. Joseph R. McCarthy from 1953 to 1954, which Ritchie edited for publication in 2003.

In addition to his OHA service, Ritchie was elected to the councils of the International Oral History Association, the American Historical Association, and the Society for History in the Federal Government, and as president of OHMAR (Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region). With Leslie Brown, he co-chaired the 2009 annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians,



Donald A. Ritchie

whose program prominently featured oral history workshops and sessions.

Ritchie said his promotion involves more administrative duties than he had previously, but he expects to continue doing oral history interviews and answering his share of the daily inquiries from senators, staff members, reporters, scholars and everyday people seeking historical information. ❖

OHA member wins prestigious national prize

The American Folklore Society's prestigious Botkin Prize for lifetime achievement in public service has been awarded to OHA member Elaine Eff, co-founder and co-director of Maryland Traditions, a partnership between the Maryland Historical Trust and the Maryland State Arts Council that aims at developing traditional folk arts.

The Botkin Prize, named for noted New Deal folklorist Benjamin A. Botkin, is the American Folklore Society's highest recognition for folklorists who work outside a university setting.

Eff earned widespread respect in Maryland for her work developing folk arts in various communities, including Baltimore's painted screens tradition and Smith Island's unique Smith Island cake. She also is widely praised for helping develop an interpretive center on Smith Island.

The Botkin Prize was presented Oct. 24, after Eff had been notified that her 20-year career with the Maryland Historical Trust was ending, her position one of 205 state jobs that were a casualty of state budget cuts.

Eff said in a September e-mail to friends and colleagues that she was particularly proud of the recent publication of *Patapsco: Life along Maryland's Historic River Valley*. The project began a decade ago, she said, "as a discrete oral history project with rich contextual photographs. It meandered through seven river towns, became exhibitions large and small, theatrical and conference presentations, narrative stages, an archive of place and finally a book."

She also pointed to Appalachian and Chesapeake Folk Festivals as important accomplishments.



Elaine Eff, recipient of the Botkin Prize for lifetime achievement in public service

"Serving the people of this state has been my dream job from day one," Eff said. ❖

From analog to digital

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Video has posed serious storage problems. Our .mxf and .mpg files are enormous; a one-hour color stereo U-Matic tape when converted to an .mxf file can be 10 gigabytes. Our Videohistory Collection has about 275 hours of interviews, with original and edited copies, and we create two copies of each new digital file, so we need hundreds of terabytes of storage space. The Smithsonian lacks server space, so we store the video files on Linear Tape Open [LTO] high density magnetic tapes, returning to magnetic tape with limited shelf life. We are still looking for an affordable storage solution for our large video files.

We store one set of the CD/DVDs and LTO tapes at our offsite storage facility, with constant temperature and humidity. We store the second set onsite, also in climate-controlled conditions. For processing and reference, we only use copies of the .mp3 audio and Windows Media Video files burned as data files to archival quality CDs and DVDs.

Analog tapes are now artifacts of the 20th century. To preserve the precious memories we recorded during that era, programs need to plan and carry out a digitization program for their collections.

Record-keeping and Metadata

Our conservator convinced me years ago of the importance of maintaining records about my tapes. We record tape brand, length, format, speed, number of tracks, monaural/stereo, equipment used to record, etc. Conservators know what tapes don't have a long shelf life, allowing us to prioritize our work. We also carefully maintain records of our digitization process: when, by whom, equipment used, program used, file formats, file specifications, name of file, size, media stored on, including brand and type, quality control completed, etc. By recording this metadata — or data about the data on the tape or in the digital file — archivists will have the information they need to work with files 20 to 30 years from now.

We also embed data in the file itself. Metadata standards are still in flux, but choose one standard and stick with it. The tool you use to enter the metadata will depend upon the file format you choose — these tools change when new programs are developed, so pick a widely-used tool that is likely to be readable in the future. Some vendors have the capability to embed file information in the file header as well.

Where to Start

While it might seem logical to start digital conversion with your oldest materials, we have started in the middle. Acid-free paper transcripts are quite stable. We first converted DOS files on 5" floppy disks, then early Windows files on 3 1/4" diskettes, then the more recent files. Once all digital files had Rich Text and Adobe .pdf text files, we started creating Adobe .pdf image files of the paper transcripts. If resources permit, we will rescans them using OCR and convert them to Adobe .pdf text files as well. For our audiotapes, we started with reel-to-reel tapes from the mid-1980s, since those tapes were deteriorating with

“sticky shed.” We next converted our cassettes, since they have a short shelf life. We then turned to our oldest reel-to-reel files, and will next convert the 1990s-early 2000s analog tapes. When you begin your conversion project, create your priority list from a number of factors, such as condition, known preservation problems, etc., not just age.

Planning

To set up a digital preservation plan for your collection, you need to conduct a survey of your tapes and transcripts, noting formats and condition. You then need to establish a preservation plan, based on usage, the expected shelf life of each format, etc. You will need to budget for equipment, programs, file storage and staff or for contracting. Digital audio and video conversion is done in real time — not on fast forward — so you need to budget for real time, with preparation and quality control built in. With your plan, you can approach funders for support. If support comes slowly, you'll need persistence, following your priorities each year, as resources become available, as we have.

In-house versus Contractors

Should your program purchase equipment and do this work in-house with your existing staff or send it out to a contractor? If you have computer expertise available, you should be able to complete digital preservation of transcripts in-house. For analog tape, given the cost of equipment, programs and training, if your collection is not large and you don't have access to equipment or expertise, contracting is the way to go. You'll need to do a great deal of quality control to ensure that your tapes are handled properly; that the labeled CD/DVD/LTO tape actually has that file on it; that the file is complete and can be played on your equipment; and that the quality is good.

If your collection is large and/or you have the equipment and expert staff, but lack funds for contracting, the work should be done in-house, setting careful standards and completing the same steps in quality control as for the contractor. For our audio tapes, we have mostly contracted out, using grant funds or pockets of money that became available. We have had quality control issues with all the contractors we have used. For the video, we purchased a proprietary system, using grant funds, and hired a part-time employee to complete the work. It takes a significant bit of expertise to operate this type of equipment so if I had it to do over again, I might contract the work out to experts.

Analog tapes are now artifacts of the 20th century. To preserve the precious memories we recorded during that era, programs need to plan and carry out a digitization program for their collections. Advice on preserving your collection can be found on Web sites such the American Institute for Conservation at <http://www.conservation-us.org> and the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts at <http://www.ccaha.org>. Despite limited funding, equipment and staff, we have made slow but steady progress by planning and prioritizing as resources become available. By documenting this work carefully, using open source, widely available, cross-platform, uncompressed formats, we hope that these digital files can continue to be used well into the 21st century. ❖



OHA election results

ELECTED TO OHA LEADERSHIP POSITIONS ARE:

FIRST VICE PRESIDENT:

- **HORACIO ROQUE RAMÍREZ**, University of California, Santa Barbara

COUNCIL MEMBER:

- **IRENE RETI**, University of California, Santa Cruz

COUNCIL MEMBER:

- **DOUG BOYD**, University of Kentucky Libraries, and

NEW MEMBERS ELECTED TO THE NOMINATING COMMITTEE ARE:

- **ROSE DIAZ**, independent historical consultant
- **DEVRA WEBER**, University of California, Riverside
- **TROY REEVES**, University of Wisconsin



PHOTO BY DOUGLAS LAMBERT

OHA Council member Doug Boyd takes a turn at bat at the Louisville Slugger Museum and Factory.

Bilingual journal published in United Arab Emirates

Liwa, an Arabic-English journal of the National Center for Documentation and Research in the United Arab Emirates, made its debut in June and invites scholarly articles related to archaeology, history and the heritage of the UAE and the Arabian Gulf region.



The journal takes its name from an oasis that holds a special place in UAE history because it served for centuries as the heartland of the Abu Dhabi ruling family.

The inaugural issue includes an article by Victor W. Geraci of the University of California-Berkeley Regional Oral History Office, describing the prospects of using oral history to document the memories “of what many believe is the last generation of citizens who fully lived and understood the traditional ways...of what is now a rapidly disappearing cultural heritage in the UAE.”

ROHO and the National Center for Documentation and Research are collaborating on efforts to develop an oral history program that will serve UAE cultural needs, the article said.

For more information about the magazine or how to submit manuscripts, contact the editor, Aisha Bilkair Abdulla Khalifaro at abilkhair@ncdr.ae. You can also find more information at www.ncdr.ae. ❖

Awards presented at OHA banquet

The Oral History Association’s awards for outstanding use of oral history in a book, nonprint media and in elementary or secondary teaching were presented at the Louisville conference final banquet.

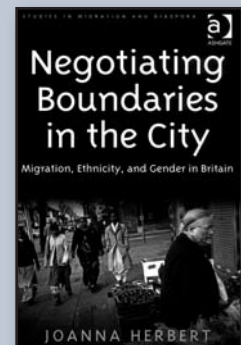
The 2009 book award went to **JOANNA HERBERT** for *Negotiating Boundaries in the City: Migration, Ethnicity, and Gender in Britain*.

The 2009 nonprint media award went to *Speaking Out! Voices of Seattle’s Black Community*, a reader’s theater project based on a collection of interviews with black Seattle and King County residents. **Honorable mention for nonprint media** went to the *Black Thursday Oral History Project*, a traveling multimedia documentary about the arrest of 94 African-American students at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh in 1968.

The 2009 Martha Ross Teaching Award went to **MEGAN WEBSTER** of St. George’s School of Montreal for interviews students conducted with members of a Cambodian community near the school.

At the 2010 OHA conference in Atlanta, awards will be presented for outstanding use of oral history in an article, for postsecondary teaching and for small and major oral history projects. New next year will be a *Vox Populi* Award recognizing oral history for social justice.

Check the OHA Web site, www.oralhistory.org, for details on award nominations. **The deadline is April 1, 2010.**



Oral history refers both to a method of recording and preserving oral testimony and to the product of that process. It begins with an audio or video recording of a first-person account made by an interviewer with an interviewee (also referred to as narrator), both of whom have the conscious intention of creating a permanent record to contribute to an understanding of the past. A verbal document, the oral history, results from this process and is preserved and made available in different forms to other users, researchers, and the public. A critical approach to the oral testimony and interpretations are necessary in the use of oral history.

The Oral History Association encourages individuals and institutions involved with the creation and preservation of oral histories to uphold certain principles, professional and technical standards, and obligations. These include commitments to the narrators, to standards of scholarship for history and related disciplines, and to the preservation of the interviews and related materials for current and future users.

Recognizing that a clear and concise guide can be useful to all practitioners of oral history, the Oral History Association has since 1968 published a series of statements aimed at outlining a set of principles and obligations for all those who use this methodology. A history of these earlier statements, and a record of the individuals involved in producing them, is available on the Oral History Association webpage at <http://www.oralhistory.org>. Building on those earlier documents, but representing changes in an evolving field, the OHA now offers *General Principles for Oral History and Best Practices for Oral History* as summaries of the organization's most important principles and best practices for the pre-interview preparation, the conduct of the interview, and the preservation and use of oral histories. These documents are not intended to be an inclusive primer on oral history; for that there are numerous manuals, guidebooks, and theoretical discussions. For the readers' convenience, a bibliography of resources is provided online at the Oral History Association Web site.

General Principles for Oral History

Oral history is distinguished from other forms of interviews by its content and extent. Oral history interviews seek an in-depth account of personal experience and reflections, with sufficient time allowed for the narrators to give their story the fullness they desire. The content of oral history interviews is grounded in reflections on the past as opposed to commentary on purely contemporary events.

Oral historians inform narrators about the nature and purpose of oral history interviewing in general and of their interview specifically. Oral historians insure that narrators voluntarily give their consent to be interviewed and understand that they can withdraw from the interview or refuse to answer a question at any time. Narrators may give this consent by signing a consent form or by recording an oral statement of consent prior to the interview. All interviews are conducted in accord with the stated aims and within the parameters of the consent.

Interviewees hold the copyright to their interviews until and unless they transfer those rights to an individual or institution. This is done by the interviewee signing a release form or in exceptional circumstances recording an oral statement to the same effect. Interviewers must insure that narrators understand the extent of their rights to the interview and the request that those rights be yielded to a repository or other party, as well as their right to put restrictions on the use of the material. All use and dissemination of the interview content must follow any restrictions the narrator places upon it.

Oral historians respect the narrators as well as the integrity of the research. Interviewers are obliged to ask historically significant questions, reflecting careful preparation for the interview and understanding of the issues to be addressed. Interviewers must also respect the narrators' equal

authority in the interviews and honor their right to respond to questions in their own style and language. In the use of interviews, oral historians strive for intellectual honesty and the best application of the skills of their discipline, while avoiding stereotypes, misrepresentations, or manipulations of the narrators' words.

Because of the importance of context and identity in shaping the content of an oral history narrative, it is the practice in oral history for narrators to be identified by name. There may be some exceptional circumstances when anonymity is appropriate, and this should be negotiated in advance with the narrator as part of the informed consent process.

Oral history interviews are historical documents that are preserved and made accessible to future researchers and members of the public. This preservation and access may take a variety of forms, reflecting changes in technology. But, in choosing a repository or form, oral historians consider how best to preserve the original recording and any transcripts made of it and to protect the accessibility and usability of the interview. The plan for preservation and access, including any possible dissemination through the Web or other media, is stated in the informed consent process and on release forms.

In keeping with the goal of long-term preservation and access, oral historians should use the best recording equipment available within the limits of their financial resources.

Interviewers must take care to avoid making promises that cannot be met, such as guarantees of control over interpretation and presentation of the interviews beyond the scope of restrictions stated in informed consent/release forms, suggestions of material benefit outside the control of the interviewer, or assurances of an open-ended relationship between the narrator and oral historian.

Best Practices for Oral History

Pre-Interview

1. Whether conducting their own research or developing an institutional project, first-time interviewers and others involved in oral history projects should seek training to prepare themselves for all stages of the oral history process.

2. In the early stages of preparation, interviewers should make contact with an appropriate repository that has the capacity to preserve the oral histories and make them accessible to the public.

3. Oral historians or others responsible for planning the oral history project should choose poten-

tial narrators based on the relevance of their experiences to the subject at hand.

4. To prepare to ask informed questions, interviewers should conduct background research on the person, topic, and larger context in both primary and secondary sources

(continued on next page)

Pre-Interview *continued*

5. When ready to contact a possible narrator, oral historians should send via regular mail or e-mail an introductory letter outlining the general focus and purpose of the interview and then follow up with either a phone call or a return e-mail. In projects involving groups in which literacy is not the norm, or when other conditions make it appropriate, participation may be solicited via face-to-face meetings.

6. After securing the narrator's agreement to be interviewed, the interviewer should schedule a non-recorded meeting. This pre-interview session will allow an exchange of information between interviewer and narrator on possible questions/topics,

reasons for conducting the interview, the process that will be involved, and the need for informed consent and legal release forms. During pre-interview discussion the interviewer should make sure that the narrator understands:

- oral history's purposes and procedures in general and of the proposed interview's aims and anticipated uses.
- his or her rights to the interviews including editing, access restrictions, copyrights, prior use, royalties, and the expected disposition and dissemination of all forms of the record, including the potential distribution electronically or online.

- that his or her recording(s) will remain confidential until he or she has given permission via a signed legal release.

7. Oral historians should use the best digital recording equipment within their means to reproduce the narrator's voice accurately and, if appropriate, other sounds as well as visual images. Before the interview, interviewers should become familiar with the equipment and be knowledgeable about its function.

8. Interviewers should prepare an outline of interview topics and questions to use as a guide to the recorded dialogue.

Interview

1. Unless part of the oral history process includes gathering soundscapes, historically significant sound events, or ambient noise, the interview should be conducted in a quiet room with minimal background noises and possible distractions.

2. The interviewer should record a "lead" at the beginning of each session to help focus his or her and the narrator's thoughts to each session's goals. The "lead" should consist of, at least, the names of narrator and interviewer, day and year of session, interview's location, and proposed subject of the recording.

3. Both parties should agree to the approximate length of the interview in advance. The interviewer is responsible for assessing whether the narrator is becoming tired and at that point should ask if the latter wishes to continue. Although most interviews last about two hours, if the narrator

wishes to continue, those wishes should be honored, if possible.

4. Along with asking creative and probing questions and listening to the answers to ask better follow-up questions, the interviewer should keep the following items in mind:

- interviews should be conducted in accord with any prior agreements made with the narrator, which should be documented for the record.
- interviewers should work to achieve a balance between the objectives of the project and the perspectives of the interviewees. Interviewers should fully explore all appropriate areas of inquiry with interviewees and not be satisfied with superficial responses. At the same time, they should encourage narrators to respond to questions in their own style and language and to address issues that reflect their concerns.

- interviewers must respect the rights of interviewees to refuse to discuss certain subjects, to restrict access to the interview, or, under certain circumstances, to choose anonymity. Interviewers should clearly explain these options to all interviewees.

- interviewers should attempt to extend the inquiry beyond the specific focus of the project to create as complete a record as possible for the benefit of others.

- in recognition of the importance of oral history to an understanding of the past and of the cost and effort involved, interviewers and interviewees should mutually strive to record candid information of lasting value.

5. The interviewer should secure a release form, by which the narrator transfers his or her rights to the interview to the repository or designated body, signed after each recording session or at the end of the last interview with the narrator.

Post Interview

1. Interviewers, sponsoring institutions, and institutions charged with the preservation of oral history interviews should understand that appropriate care and storage of original recordings begins immediately after their creation.

2. Interviewers should document their preparation and methods, including the circumstances of the interviews, and provide that information to whatever repository will be preserving and providing access to the interview.

3. Information deemed relevant for the interpretation of the oral history by future users, such as photographs, documents, or other records, should be collected, and archivists should make clear to users the availability and connection of these materials to the recorded interview.

4. The recordings of the interviews should be stored, processed, refreshed and accessed according to established archival standards designated for the media format used. Whenever possible, all

efforts should be made to preserve electronic files in formats that are cross platform and nonproprietary. Finally, the obsolescence of all media formats should be assumed and planned for.

5. In order to augment the accessibility of the interview, repositories should make transcriptions, indexes, time tags, detailed descriptions or other written guides to the contents.

6. Institutions charged with the preservation and access of oral history interviews should honor the stipulations of prior agreements made with the interviewers or sponsoring institutions, including restrictions on access and methods of distribution.

7. The repository should comply to the extent to which it is aware with the letter and spirit of the interviewee's agreement with the interviewer and sponsoring institution. If written documentation such as consent and release forms does not exist, then the institution should make a good faith effort to contact interviewees regarding their intent. When media become available that did not

exist at the time of the interview, those working with oral history should carefully assess the applicability of the release to the new formats and proceed — or not — accordingly.

8. All those who use oral history interviews should strive for intellectual honesty and the best application of the skills of their discipline. They should avoid stereotypes, misrepresentations, and manipulations of the narrator's words. This includes foremost striving to retain the integrity of the narrator's perspective, recognizing the subjectivity of the interview, and interpreting and contextualizing the narrative according to the professional standards of the applicable scholarly disciplines. Finally, if a project deals with community history, the interviewer should be sensitive to the community, taking care not to reinforce thoughtless stereotypes. Interviewers should strive to make the interviews accessible to the community and where appropriate to include representatives of the community in public programs or presentations of the oral history material. ❖

In Remembrance...

Brother Blue, storyteller and friend of oral historians

If you were ever a newcomer to an Oral History Association annual conference, as I was in Birmingham in 1993, my first year as **Newsletter** editor, you probably met Brother Blue. He seemed to seek out newcomers, making it his mission to welcome them.

I don't know what he said to men, but he invariably called a woman "lovely lady." From anyone other than this blue-garbed gentleman, with his expressive eyes, his natty beret and butterfly-adorned clothing, it would seem like gratuitous flattery. But to Brother Blue, everyone was beautiful.

Brother Blue, aka Hugh Morgan Hill, and his wife, Ruth Edmonds Hill, were fixtures at OHA meetings until this year, when illness prevented him from attending. He died Nov. 3 at his home in Cambridge, Mass. He was 88.

Brother Blue's storyteller persona and passion for people often provided the coda to OHA sessions, with his sometimes whimsical, often poignant, always generous remarks that made it easy to see how he became internationally acclaimed as a performance artist.

A native of Cleveland, Hugh Morgan Hill served in the Army in both European and Pacific theaters during World War II. He returned and earned a bachelor's degree from Harvard College, a master's in playwriting from the Yale School of Drama and a Ph.D. in storytelling from Union Graduate School.

By the late 1960s, Hill was telling stories in prisons, classrooms and street corners and adopted the name Brother Blue, which was said to originate with a mentally disabled younger brother, who could say "blue" but not "Hugh." Brother Blue also was said to have adopted his butterfly motif in memory of that brother, who died at a young age.

Brother Blue mentored aspiring storytellers for decades in Cambridge and, with his wife, recorded hundreds of hours of storytelling and other programming for Cambridge Community Radio and Cambridge Community Television. He won numerous awards in the United States and around the world for his work and was named the official storyteller of Cambridge and Boston.



Brother Blue, aka Hugh Morgan Hill, and his wife, Ruth Edmonds Hill, outside the studios of Cambridge Community Television in Cambridge, Mass.

Brother Blue would say he told his stories "from the middle of the middle of me to the middle of the middle of you." He believed stories could save the world because if you ever heard someone else's story, you could never harm that person.

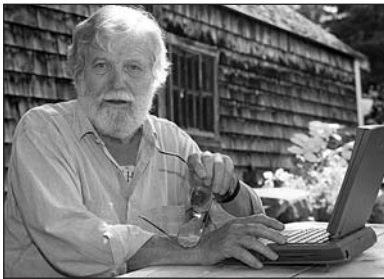
Within hours of his death, people whose lives he had touched began sharing their memories online. In one e-mail message, OHA past president Alphine Jefferson wrote:

"Dear Friends, I will not be sad because sadness steals away the spirit. Brother Blue is flying with the butterflies. I rejoice because I live in the spaces he created for all of us to sing song and love poem. We featured him in the gardens at the presidential reception in New Orleans and gave him space at every meeting. When others turned him away, oral history provided a consistent venue for his lovely words and generous praise.

"I marvel not that his earthly form has passed, but in the joy that he stayed with us so long.

"Fly Away, Brother Blue, Fly Away!" ❖

Sandy Ives, folklorist and oral historian



Edward D. "Sandy" Ives

Edward D. "Sandy" Ives, folklorist and oral historian whose work introduced untold numbers of people to the practice of collecting information from everyday people, died Aug. 1 at his home in Orono, Maine. He was 83.

Ives, who was honored at a number of Oral History Association meetings for his lifetime accomplishments, influenced hundreds of students in his 44 years at the University of Maine where he established the Maine Folklife Center in 1992. He edited and wrote numerous books based on his lifetime pursuit of collecting songs and stories of the men in the logging industry in Maine and Canada's Maritime provinces.

Some of Ives' earliest field recordings of songs from the lumber camps were selected in 2006 for inclusion in the Library of Congress' National Recording Registry.

But for oral historians, perhaps even more far-reaching was his book *The Tape Recorded Interview: A Manual for Field Workers in Folklore and Oral History* and a how-to video, *An Oral Historian's Work*, used in untold numbers of classrooms and community workshops across the country. And except for the now-antiquated equipment depicted in

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the 1987 video, it still contains some of the best advice available on oral history methodology.

Ives served in the U.S. Marine Corps and earned a bachelor's degree in English and history at Hamilton College, a master's degree in medieval literature at Columbia University and a doctorate in folklore from Indiana University. He taught at Illinois College and the City College of New York before going to the University of Maine, where he first taught in the English department and later moved to anthropology. He also was a guest lecturer at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland, and the University of Sheffield, England.

OHA member Pamela Dean, one of Ives' students who ultimately followed his footsteps to the Maine Folklife Center, recalled his gift of friendship, saying in an e-mail announcement about his death:

"Unlike the author of *Everything I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*, everything I need to know in this life or the next I learned in Sandy's class and over the nearly 30 years I was blessed with his friendship."

She cited a passage from Ives' final book, *Drive Dull Care Away: Folksongs from Prince Edward Island*, in which he recalled the day his perspective on his work changed. He wrote:

"Up to then, I had tended to think of fieldwork as getting, a raiding of sorts in which I rescued items of value from almost certain oblivion. But that day I felt that what I had received had not been so much gotten by me as given, and given very generously, by people whose only reward was the pleasure of sharing. I like that way of looking at fieldwork." ❖

An Oral Historian's Work offers timeless advice

It's a video with a running time of only 33 minutes. Perfect for an introductory college classroom or a church basement or a library meeting room or any of the wide-ranging community locations where countless groups of would-be interviewers have gotten their first taste of what it takes to be an oral historian.

In the 1987 video *An Oral Historian's Work*, an avuncular Sandy Ives looks into the camera and admonishes novices that oral history "involves far more than simply tape recording a conversation."

And from that moment, Ives dispenses practical advice that has stood the test of time.

The award-winning Maine folklorist and oral historian died in August, but many of us who learned about him and from him only through a video screen continue to appreciate the oral history fundamentals he advocated in his plain-spoken manner.

Over time, some stopped using *An Oral Historian's Work* as a teaching tool because the aging technology merely looked quaint. Ives mentions open-reel recorders in addition to cassette tape recorders and says at one point, "You can even use video." Well, duh, a 21st century oral historian might reply.

He stores his stuff in what appears to be a well-worn canvas rucksack and types two-fingered on a clacking typewriter, complete with carriage return! And his transcriptionist describes the use of a word processor that would only be found today in a technology museum or a dank basement.

But what hasn't aged is his careful description of the oral history process, advice that remains as solid today as it was more than two decades ago:

Get to know your equipment, Ives says, and "make sure it's in record mode."

"Never go into an interview cold," he advises. "It's almost impossible to over-prepare." Do background research by reading local histories, searching out local historical societies and local libraries, finding records in town or county offices, studying maps. The video shows him pulling a large bound volume of local newspapers off a shelf at the Machias, Maine, public library, a reminder that people really could do research before Google.

Look for interviewees who not only have the information you're looking for but are able and willing to share it. And be sure to get good directions to their home, he says.

Ives explains the essential task of getting legal release forms signed and demonstrates interviewing techniques for calming a nervous narrator, asking follow-up questions, documenting photographs in an interview and using silence to draw out a narrator.

The video walks viewers through the process of transcribing, audit-checking and archiving oral history materials, too, and Ives stresses the importance of including in the archival record his own journal notes about the interview content and context, "anything that would help me or a researcher at a later date."

It's all there in a nutshell. It's not modern. No fancy multimedia footwork. But oral historians who follow Sandy Ives' advice won't go wrong. The oral history process, he tells viewers, "makes history not just words in a book, but flesh and blood experience."

Thank you, Sandy Ives. I can't say I ever knew you, but you were one of my oral history teachers nonetheless. And to this day, I always check to be sure it's in record mode!

Mary Kay Quinlan, Editor
OHA Newsletter

Hubert Humphreys, Louisiana historian

Hubert D. Humphreys, history professor emeritus at Louisiana State University-Shreveport and a former Oral History Association member, died Aug. 28. He was 86.

Humphreys planned and implemented the campus' archival program and oral history program and was involved in numerous Louisiana and national history and archival organizations.

Humphreys joined the Civilian Conservation Corps after high school graduation and worked for the Army Corps of Engineers before joining the Navy in 1943. He served in numerous battles in the Pacific. After the war he attended Louisiana State University on the G.I. Bill and began what became a long and distinguished teaching career in the state. ❖

Oral History of Illinois Agriculture Project

By Robert E. Warren, Illinois State Museum

The Illinois State Museum's Oral History of Illinois Agriculture project launched its Audio-Video Barn Web site (<http://avbarn.museum.state.il.us>) at a press conference in November 2009. The new Web site contains more than 130 audio and video recordings of oral history interviews with people involved in agriculture and rural life in Illinois. It tells the story of Illinois agriculture from the people who know it best — grain farmers, beekeepers, elk ranchers, 4-H kids, college professors and pumpkin growers from every corner of the state.

A two-year National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services provides support for the project. Robert Warren, the museum's curator of anthropology, is the principal investigator. The Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) is a major partner. Mark DePue, ALPLM director of oral history, serves as co-principal investigator.

The main goal of the project is to develop a Web site — the Audio-Video Barn — featuring digital oral history interviews with a wide range of people in Illinois agriculture. Some interview recordings came from old audio tapes housed in library archives. Others are from new audio or video interviews with people who have either retired from agriculture, are actively engaged in agriculture or are looking forward to future careers in agriculture. Another project goal is to index the interview recordings by subject matter so users of the Web site can search them interactively for subjects of special interest. The project's five organizational themes include land, plants, animals, people and technology.

Sixty interviews were obtained from audio tapes archived in libraries at Northern Illinois University (NIU) and the University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS). The NIU interviews were recorded in 1986 by student interviewers in a class taught by Valerie Yow. Interviewees were from DeKalb County and other nearby counties in northern Illinois. The UIS interviews were culled



DOUG CARR, ILLINOIS STATE MUSEUM

Robert Warren, left, and Mike Maniscalco, right, conduct a walk-and-talk interview with Oba Herschberger, center, an Amish farmer who raises Belgian draft horses in central Illinois.

from a large oral history collection founded by Cullom Davis. These were recorded from 1972 to 1993 with individuals living primarily in central and southern Illinois. One additional interview, the oldest in the collection, was recently donated to the ISM by the granddaughter of the interviewee, George Howe (1870-1953). The interview was recorded in 1952 on Howe's 82nd birthday, and in it he recalls childhood experiences from the 1880s with a horse-drawn plow.

In partnership with the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, we also proposed to record 50 new interviews. Interviewees were selected from a list of more than 160 candidates. In our selection process we sought gender balance, ethnic diversity, young people as well as adults, broad geographical dispersion and experience in many different aspects of agriculture. One difficulty we encountered was stopping at 50 interviews; golden opportunities arose throughout the interview process, and we failed to draw the line until we had conducted 78 new interviews with 84 individuals.

Most of the new interviews were recorded with digital video cameras so

that sights as well as sounds could be displayed on the Web site. Many of these are traditional sit-down interviews in which interviewees talk about their life histories and their agricultural experiences. Others are walk-and-talk interviews in which interviewees demonstrate agricultural activities in the field, in the orchard or in the dairy barn. For example, in one walk-and-talk interview, an Amish farmer provides a narrative on horse training as the video clip shows a team of six Belgian draft horses pulling a harvesting machine across a field of alfalfa. In another, a professor of animal sciences from the University of Illinois demonstrates a novel computerized feeding mechanism that allows researchers to monitor the food intake and weight gain of individual beef cattle.

The 139 interviews housed in the Audio-Video Barn correspond to more than 300 hours of interview recordings. Hundreds of topics are discussed by a diverse sample of people whose firsthand agricultural experiences extend from the 1880s to 2009. Perhaps the biggest challenge of our project was to develop a mechanism that would allow Web visitors to quickly and easily find

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Timuel Black shares memories of growing up in Chicago

When you're in your 90s, you've had plenty of time to accumulate memories.

And when you're Timuel D. Black, Chicago educator, author, civil rights activist and oral historian, you dig into your storehouse of memories and share them with fellow oral historians.

Like the dinner table memories.

"We had to be home for dinner," Black recalled at an Oral History Association conference session. He and his brother would sit and listen as their parents talked about the important things.

"They would talk about religion and faith and hope for the future...and then they'd talk about paying bills," he said. Pay the rent first, then buy food, and always plenty of toilet paper.

And they would talk about education and about politics.

"We were very clear in that period that if we put the rascals in, we could take the rascals out."

There was no question in Black's family that when you got old enough, you were going to register to vote and then you were going to the polls. On election days, his dad would ask, "Did you vote?"

"It became a part of the political culture and behavior," he said. "We registered and we voted and we bragged about it to our peers."

Those who didn't register and vote were "outside the mainstream," Black said, a pattern that continued in Chicago's black community until after World War II.

Black, who earned four battle stars for his Army service during World War II, was at Normandy six days after D-Day and was among the men who supplied troops in the Battle of the Bulge.

But most memorable, he said, was when he drove in a Jeep with his commanding officer to Buchenwald after the Nazi

concentration camp had been liberated by U.S. and British troops in 1945.

"Before we could get there, you could smell the stench," Black said. And the prisoners who were still alive, "you could almost see their bones."

"I started crying," Black said. "I was so angry, my first impulse was to kill all the Germans."

To Black, the Nazi death camp was just like slavery, "only quicker."

If you asked German citizens how they could have let such a thing happen, they simply transferred responsibility, Black recalled. "Oh, Mister," they'd say. "It wasn't us, it was the Fuhrer."

That infuriated him.

"I was so hurt, so angry that I made a decision that the rest of my life would be spent trying to bring a better world."

Black said he hasn't "done a very good job" at that, but others likely would disagree. He was a teacher in Chicago for 42 years, which he called "the most satisfying years of my life."

Black's books, *Bridges of Memory* and *Bridges of Memory, Vol. 2*, are based on oral history interviews with members of the first and second generations of African Americans from the South who migrated to Chicago. He said he had been influenced by the late Studs Terkel to document the community in which he grew up, and he subsequently wrote *Bridges of Memory* because his children urged him to write a book.

At the OHA session, Black was interviewed by OHA past president Alphine Jefferson at a session that originally was planned to include conversations with storyteller Brother Blue and his wife, Ruth Edmonds Hill of Radcliffe's Schlesinger Library. Brother Blue's illness prevented him and his wife from attending. ❖

Tales from eastern Kentucky on display at awards banquet

Tucked in the hills and forests of eastern Kentucky's coal-mining region is a world-class media, arts and educational organization known as Appalshop, which brought its entertaining and thought-provoking images, words and music to the OHA Saturday night awards banquet.

Appalshop was born in 1969 as a federal War on Poverty program that aimed to train youth in making documentary films. It also operates a community radio station, a community theater that performs works based on oral history and sponsors international exchanges.

Maureen Mullinax of Knox College said Appalshop is about place and neighbors and aims to focus a spotlight on connections between "people in eastern Kentucky and other marginalized groups."

"At the very center," she said, "it's about story."

Appalshop projects have addressed a wide array of controversial issues, including strip mining, water pollution and a recent phenomenon of building prisons as an economic development tool in a region known to outsiders for its poverty and isolation.

In comments following Appalshop's engaging presentation, Italian author and oral historian Alessandro Portelli recalled his first visit to Appalshop in 1973.

He said he decided right then, "This is what I want to be when I grow up."

He praised the Appalshop efforts to use documentary techniques to examine the community and advocate for change.

"Intellectuals come from all over to tell these people what's wrong with them," Portelli said. But Appalshop has shown you can learn from the community and celebrate it, "but don't pander to it."

Community members criticize their community because they love it, he said, and because they want to save it. ❖

Oral History of Illinois agricultural project

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material of interest to them in this large body of interviews. In partnership with Michael Frisch of Randforce Associates LLC (University at Buffalo, SUNY), we used a sophisticated new tool called “digital indexing” to make the audio and video recordings searchable. The first step was to subdivide each recording into a comprehensive series of 8-10 minute segments. At the same time, we also identified 1-2 minute story clips within many of the segments — brief highlights that we think will be of special interest. The second step was to index each of the segments and story clips by subject matter content: themes,

names, places, dates, topics and other searchable keywords. Our indexed recordings total about 1,500 segments and 2,500 story clips.

The Audio-Video Barn Web site, developed by Erich Schroeder, the museum’s associate curator, serves all of the interview recordings in a variety of searchable formats. Users can browse the interviews by family name or by collection (ISM, ALPLM, NIU, UIS), and browsing aids make it possible to narrow one’s search by interview date, age at interview, gender or county. On a Clip Search page, users can find interview segments or clips that refer to spe-

cific themes, topics, dates, places, names or named things. One can choose from one or more thematic lists of onscreen terms or enter one or more keywords in a search box. Other sections of the Web site provide interviewee biographies, interview transcripts and thematic picture galleries.

Educational resources include material on teaching oral history in the classroom and standards-based lesson plans in fine arts, language arts, natural science and social science. The interactive Audio-Video Barn gives Web visitors a rich, personal view of Illinois agriculture — past, present and future. ❖

Museum of Chinese in America founder highlights value of oral history

It has been three decades since John Kuo Wei Tchen co-founded the New York Chinatown History Project in an attempt to document the city’s fabled Chinatown at a time when newcomers were bringing rapid change and had no idea what had preceded them.

The modest, but determined, start, with efforts to take on topics such as documenting the history of Chinese hand laundries, ultimately became the Museum of Chinese in America, a 14,000-square-foot space designed by architect Maya Lin in a historic warehouse on the edge of Chinatown.

Tchen showed extensive slides of the new museum and some of its exhibits as the keynote speaker at the OHA conference’s Friday luncheon.

In the early days, Tchen recalled, “We found ourselves doing a lot of Dumpster-diving” to retrieve discarded photos and papers of old-timers — letters, documents, business records and the like.

But the intent never was to collect “stuff” and create a museum. Rather, it was to create community dialogue about what it means to be Chinese in America. Out of that, the museum’s exhibits and collections have evolved, relying significantly on oral histories and other first-person accounts.

The museum’s new core exhibit, “With a Single Step: Stories in the

Making of America,” explores a journey of migration, Tchen said, beginning with the arrival in the late 18th century of the first Chinese in the United States.

Through photographs, Tchen led OHA members through the museum exhibit, which ends by asking visitors for their own contributions with a StoryMap inviting people to document their own family stories as part of the ongoing journey of Chinese in America. Digital visitors to the museum’s Web site, www.mocanyc.org, also can contribute to the StoryMap collection.

Engaging visitors in the dialogue is just one example of how the museum rejects the notion of a top-down curatorial authority, Tchen said.

He took issue with a *New York Times* review of the museum’s opening in which the reviewer derided the concept of what he called “identity museums” that celebrate a “hyphenated existence.”

Tchen said his museum specifically decided not to use the hyphenated term Chinese-American, and he rejected the reviewer’s suggestion that the purpose of such museums is to celebrate a “grievance narrative.”

Rather, he said, its purpose is to create an ongoing dialogue within the community to explore and understand its history and define “a new type of belonging.” ❖

Arkansas award for women’s history

A \$1,000 prize for the best unpublished essay on topics in Arkansas women’s history is being offered by the Arkansas Women’s History Institute. The Susie Pryor Award is named in honor of Susie Hampton Newton Pryor, one of the first women to run for political office in Arkansas. She also was a community leader, local historian, mother and writer.

Deadline for submission of manuscripts is Feb. 15, 2010.

For more information and guidelines on submitting manuscripts, go to the history institute’s Web site:

www.arkansaswomen.org or call Heather Register Zbinden at 501-683-3615. ❖

Call for Papers

Times of Crisis, Times of Change: Human Stories on the Edge of Transformation

2010 OHA Annual Meeting, Oct. 27–31, 2010 • Atlanta, Georgia

Times of great crisis may offer the prospect and promise of great change. The economic, political and environmental tensions of the present are powerfully reshaping our world. People find themselves trapped within global forces that often appear to act upon people in ways beyond their control. At the same time, moments of great crisis engender powerful new visions of change and transformation. Whether as involuntary subjects or active agents, people live and embody these changes. Their memories are critical windows on human struggles, resilience, myth-making and the political power of stories, forcing a reckoning with the past as well as a reconsideration of the future.

The theme of the 2010 annual meeting of the Oral History Association is inspired by the times in which we are living and the setting for our conference. Atlanta is an historic city defined by a vibrant and sometimes contested history of activism for civil and human rights. It is also a city transformed by waves of rural to urban migration, immigration, urbanization and changes in the global economy, all of which have produced crisis, real or imagined, in Atlanta's complex network of local communi-

ties. Taking a cue from this dynamic setting, we ask: How have people struggled and survived in times of crisis? How do people create change and bear witness to it? How do they construct their stories of these moments? In what ways have stories of crisis and change shaped public memories of pivotal historical eras? How do we reconcile contradictory stories of crisis and change?

The Program Committee welcomes broad and diverse interpretations of the conference theme as reflected in proposals for panels, individual papers, performances, exhibits, roundtables and other approaches to interactive sessions. Presenters are reminded to incorporate voice and image in their presentations. OHA is open to proposals from the variety of fields traditionally represented in our meetings, including history, folklore, literature, sociology, anthropology, American and ethnic studies, cultural studies, political science, information science and technology, communications and urban studies. We also hope to have a significant international presence at the meeting. And, as always, OHA welcomes proposals from independent scholars, community activists and organizers, archivists, librarians, museum cura-

tors, Web designers, documentary producers, media artists, ethnographers, public historians and all practitioners whose work is relevant to this meeting's interest in narratives of crisis and change.

Proposal format: For full sessions, submit a title, a session abstract of not more than two pages, and a one-page vita or resume for each participant. For individual proposals, submit a one-page abstract and a one-page vita or resume of the presenter. Each submission must be accompanied by a cover sheet, which can be downloaded.

The **deadline** for submission of all proposals is **Jan. 15, 2010**. All proposals should be submitted via e-mail to oha@dickinson.edu, or if available, through the online submission page on the OHA Web site, at www.oralhistory.org. The cover sheet and all proposal documents must be combined into one attachment in Microsoft WORD format. Please do not send the documents as separate attachments. If you do not receive e-mail confirmation by Jan. 29, 2010, please contact the OHA office to make sure your submission has been received.

Proposal queries may be directed to:

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News & Notes ...

Mark your calendars for the 2011 Oral History Association conference, scheduled for Oct. 12-16, 2011, in Denver at the Renaissance Denver Hotel. The OHA last met in Colorado in 1980, so plan to join a new generation of oral historians enjoying the Mile High City.

The National Coalition for History reports that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation recently gave \$10 million to the capital campaign for a new Smithsonian Museum of African American History and Culture. The museum is planned for a five-acre tract near the Washington Monument and is expected to open in late 2015.

The pricetag for the design, construction and initial exhibit installation is expected to be about \$500 million, half funded by Congress and the rest of the money raised by the museum. Plans call for groundbreaking for the 300,000-square-foot museum in 2012.

Oral History Review book review editor John Wolford gave more than 200 books to reviewers and potential reviewers at the Louisville OHA conference. If you find an oral history book you'd like to review or want to be on Wolford's list of people interested in reviewing books on particular topics, you can e-mail him at: wolford.john@gmail.com.

Oral history legal guide published

OHA members can get the latest information about legal issues affecting oral history in *A Guide to Oral History and the Law* by John A. Neuenschwander.

Published by Oxford University Press, the 167-page book includes an extensive appendix with sample release forms that relate to a variety of oral history interviewing situations, including sample Institutional Review Board forms.

Neuenschwander, a past OHA president, is professor of history emeritus at Carthage College and is a municipal judge in Kenosha, Wis. He is also the author of the widely used OHA pamphlet, *Oral History and the Law*.

Visit www.oralhistory.org for more information