



**at Fifty**

**Reflections on a  
Half Century of Service**

**Edited by Irene Reti and Cameron Vanderscoff**

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## Preface

In 1966, a coalition of people interested in oral history joined together for the first time at Lake Arrowhead, California, ultimately forming the Oral History Association. This volume was born of an impulse to prepare something for the OHA's fiftieth anniversary that would give an indication of how far we have come as an organization—what battles we have fought, what victories we have won, and what issues may still perplex us greatly. In conference calls and meetings, the history subcommittee of the OHA fiftieth anniversary task force brainstormed a number of different options, and based on a fine recommendation from Alphine Jefferson, we ultimately decided that we should develop a publication. (The reader is asked to kindly ignore the irony of this decision, coming as it did from a group so heavily invested in the non-print representation of people's recollections.)

Our goal was to create something that would have some interactive, multimedia facets, so we began to focus on an online publication that would be a compilation of essays authored by past presidents of the OHA combined with links to audio and video resources. We sent letters of invitation to the living presidents for whom we could find contact information, and we asked them to reflect on their time leading the organization. To assist in the process, we provided them with seven questions to help structure their contributions. They were allowed to answer this call however they preferred. Of the pieces we received, some were direct responses to those questions while others approached the essays differently, either taking their own paths for their narratives or providing excerpts from previous oral history interviews that had been done with them. These pieces were then edited by task force members Irene Reti and Cameron Vanderscoff, to whom I am indebted. Additional links to associated audio and video excerpts will be available as this publication expands following our 2016 conference in Long Beach, and we are grateful to Deborah Hendrix for the camera work and subsequent editing that she did for the segments filmed at the annual meeting in Tampa in 2015.

All of the responses we received are as inspirational as they are instructive, and the one thing that seems to tie them all together (aside from concerns about finances) is the belief that the OHA is a collegial and welcoming home for practitioners from a wide array of disciplines. I want to thank all of the past presidents who contributed their time to this project, and all of the OHA members of all stripes who have contributed their time to the organization over the years. Our association is what it is because of your efforts, and we stand on the shoulders of giants.

Mary A. Larson  
Chair, OHA Fiftieth Anniversary Task Force

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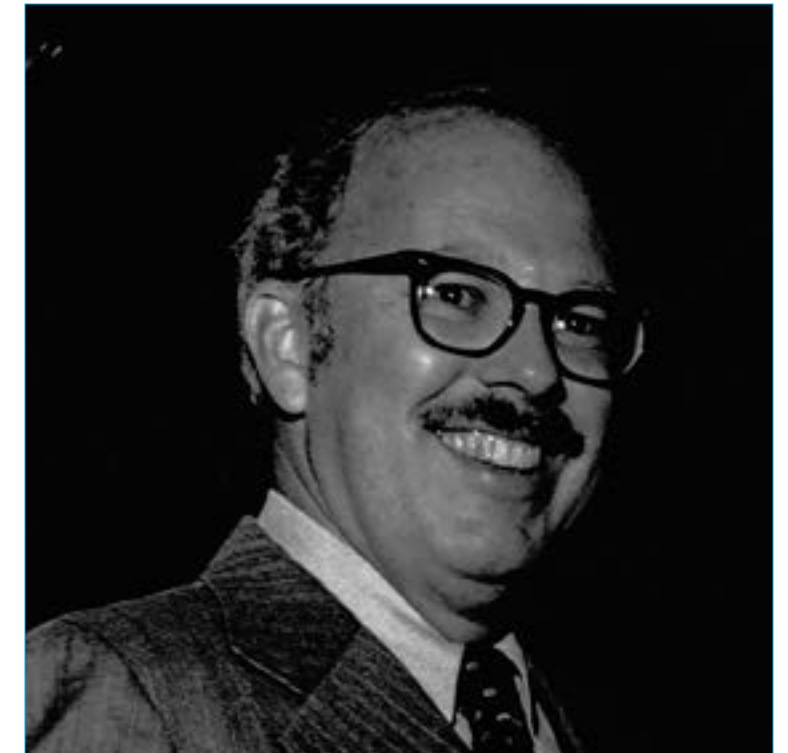
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## **Charles Morrissey**

### **President 1971-1972**

While getting ready to shmooze with OHA members during the upcoming fiftieth anniversary meeting of the Oral History Association in Long Beach, October 12-16, I may scrawl a cartoonish cobra on my name card, putting a smile on the face of this snake.

Why couple my name with a smiling cobra?

Louis (“Louie”) Starr was director of the Oral History Research Office (OHRO) at Columbia University when James V. Mink called the first national meeting of oral historians at Lake Arrowhead, California, in September 1966. Louis never recovered from the jolting reality that the initiative for this colloquium came from southern California. He regretted it did not come instead from Columbia in New York City. That’s where Allan Nevins had started this nation’s first institutional oral history program. Nevins had selected Starr as his successor at Columbia’s OHRO. Jim Mink, earlier that year, however, had persuaded Nevins, age seventy-six and ensconced as a senior research associate at the Huntingdon Library in sunny San Marino, to be a headline speaker at Lake Arrowhead. Starr felt upstaged.

To compensate, Starr hosted the second national colloquium at Columbia’s conference facility at Armonk, New York. Because of Columbia’s eminence in the small (but rapidly growing) world of oral history, Starr, in 1967, was understandably elected the first president of the OHA. But after his one-year term ended he continued to presume he was “Mister Oral History,” endowed with the authority to tell OHA officers how to manage OHA affairs, plan meetings, invite speakers, etc. Needless to say, his behavior posed problems for subsequent OHA presidents. This included my predecessor, Forrest C. Pogue, and myself as vice president. Compounding our shared problem of fractured leadership was a fiscal reality: the OHA had hardly any money in its treasury.

Often in long telephone conversations Forrest and I would discuss “the Louie Problem.” It was amply difficult trying to run a professional association without sufficient funds. Fending with a free-roaming ex-president imbued with the self-promoted prestige of his program (first and biggest) added to our mutual burden.

One summer afternoon in Montpelier’s Pavilion Building, seated at my manual typewriter near the open door of my office at the Vermont Historical Society, I was typing a letter to Forrest about reducing “the Louie Problem.” Suddenly in my doorway appeared the unexpected figure of Louis Starr.

He had a summer home at Lake George in upstate New York and without any fore-notice had driven to Montpelier. “Oh, Louie,” I said with a nervous quiver in my voice, as I laid my elbow across the top of my letter to Forrest. I couldn’t stand up to greet him without revealing what was hidden beneath my elbow. Louis and I chatted briefly while he stood in the doorway. I never invited him to enter and sit. Likely he may have justifiably felt I certainly wasn’t hospitable when he visited.

Louis had arranged for the official OHA mailing address to be at Columbia’s OHRO. Some of us were uneasy about this situation, wondering if Louis was touting Columbia’s oral history status when responding to “how-to” queries about prospective oral history start-ups. The leadership agreed to shift the OHA home office. This preliminary decision was made during my presidential year at the Austin meeting on the afternoon of November 10, 1972. With the Council’s concurrence I suggested we defer the final vote until after I informed Louis of our intention and invited him to attend our Saturday morning meeting to present his case for retaining Columbia as OHA headquarters.

At the cocktail party late that afternoon I told Louis what was pending. He was astonished and furious. Immediately he bird-dogged officers and council-members throughout the large gorgeous room atop the Lyndon B. Johnson Library. All he buttonholed apparently confirmed the process underway.

At the outset of the Council meeting on Saturday morning, he made his argument for Columbia. Council members listened intensely. The final vote to move the official headquarters to the University of Vermont (thank you, Sam Hand!) was unanimous. Louis left, slamming the door so forcefully I feared it had come loose from its hinges.

Almost four years later, on October 27, 1976, at Channing House, a retirement center in Palo Alto, California, I interviewed Mary Richardson Nevins, the widow of Allan Nevins. I asked her about her husband’s choice of “oral history” for the title of Columbia’s interview program. She regularly exchanged letters with Louis and his assistant Elizabeth B. Mason at Columbia. These letters from her were saved, and Ronald J. Grele found them when he became director of Columbia’s OHRO.

In one of them, Mrs. Nevins remarked that Charles Morrissey had visited recently at Channing House. Came the reply from OHRO telling her that she had just met “the smiling cobra.”

This emphasis on troubling tensions’ hampering the early leadership of the OHA elevates the risk of not putting this discontent in proper perspective. The “Louie Problem” was an exception to the prevailing ethos of the early OHA. Officers and council members were zestfully committed to bettering the OHA. Knox Mellon and Ronald Marcello were bulwarks as treasurer and secretary. Our meetings, then and long afterwards, were jovial and jubilantly enriching as learning opportunities. They were fun, too. There was dancing at the firehouse at Lake Arrowhead, bonfires on the beach at Pacific Grove, and square dancing at later colloquia. Participants seemed to mix easily with each other—newcomers and old-timers. I fondly remember urging attendees not to hesitate about schmoozing with unacquainted oral historians because they would meet interesting people. I mentioned examples: Enid Douglass was Mayor of Claremont, California; Fern Ingersoll had published her MA thesis about dance in Indonesia; Amelia Fry had performed with a symphony orchestra as a featured violinist; Peter Olch, MD, ran a rare-book and used-book business from his home in Kensington, Maryland, specializing in Western Americana; Martha Ross, white-skinned and diminutive, had carried a placard for civil rights in her hometown of Selma, Alabama; Saul Benison told funny Yiddish jokes (with a Brooklyn accent thicker than Bernie Sanders’s).

Outside of annual colloquia, we socialized often. I have been a guest in the homes of nineteen former OHA presidents. Once during dinner at Willa Baum’s home in Berkeley, her pet parrot escaped outdoors, and I was one of several guests who went searching neighborhood trees for it. In the course of retrieving it, I mulled on how amiable oral history ties can even entail listening for bird twerps. (A regret about Willa: I never could persuade her to allow us to nominate and elect her to the OHA presidency.)

I like to quote Wallace E. Stegner, one of my favorite authors. He was a Westerner who nonetheless spent lots of time in Greensboro, Vermont, one village away from mine. About all Americans he said, “We are the unfinished products of a long becoming.” That is also true of today’s OHA.

Putting all things into context, the overriding consensus about the early OHA is clearly evident: in essence, much harmony, little dissonance. Maybe I shouldn’t scrawl a smiling cobra on my name card.



## John E. Wickman

### President 1972-1973

[Transcription from a recording made by Dr. Wickman on February 27, 2016 at his residence in Abilene, Kansas.]

I was president of the Oral History Association in 1972 to 1973. I was born in Villa Park, Illinois, in 1929, and my interest in oral history grew out of my teaching, starting in 1959. At that time I was an instructor in history at Hanover College in Hanover, Indiana, and was made aware of the more general interest in oral history through the newsletter of the American Association for State and Local History. I was not able to make the first meeting at Arrowhead, California, but I did make the organizational meeting at the Arden House Conference Center in 1967.

By that time I was the director of the Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene, Kansas, and attempting to put together a comprehensive program on oral history. We worked very closely with Louis Starr at the Columbia Oral History Office and Elizabeth Mason, and using the resources they had already gathered with an Eisenhower oral history project, we did eventually put together a project of our own. Since I came in at the beginning of the association’s life, I worked closely with Forrest Pogue, O.O. Winther, Peter Olch, Willa Baum, Amelia Fry, Charles Morrissey, Charles Crawford (who immediately succeeded me as president of the Oral History Association), and most closely with Lila Johnson Goff, who also became president of the Oral History Association. Lila and I put together a set of training tapes on oral history interviewing; we went around to various national associations and presented programs on oral history interviewing techniques. One of my major interests in oral history was for my students to be able to find a way to enter the history field without finding positions in more academically oriented positions, so those who had a bachelor’s or a master’s degree could find employment in oral history programs, and that certainly was the case.

My teaching career spans three years at Hanover College, two years at Northwest Missouri State in Maryville, Missouri, and then one year at Purdue University Center at the Fort Wayne center in Fort Wayne, Indiana. In addition to that, I held two post-doctoral fellowships—one with the National Center for Education and Politics from 1964 to 1965 and a second congressional fellowship in 1975 and 1976. In those settings, I also used some of the skills I acquired as an oral historian.

The major problems I encountered in the early days of the Oral History Association were simply to establish an association and work on guidelines regarding the doing of oral history, then working up the legal parameters

of how to conduct the work of the association and its members while keeping in mind some of the legal considerations of doing oral history interviewing and the instruments of deposit and the use of the end product in the various institutions. That took up most of our early years. I watched the association grow from about 110 participants at Arden House into many hundreds of people involved in oral history in all of its varied forms, from the contributions made by Studs Terkel, to some of the smaller programs in connection with historic houses, county historical societies, and state historical societies across the country.

One of our early concerns with work in the oral history field was the cost of travel frequently needed to talk to interviewees, as well as the cost of doing the transcriptions. We also were concerned with the technology of the recording devices that we used. Originally, we started out with Wollensak as the major reel-to-reel recorder. They were extremely large and heavy and hard to transport from place to place, then, of course, as time progressed in the '60s and the '70s it got down to the micro recorder, and that certainly made things a lot easier for people who were doing oral history interviewing."

Since retiring as director of the Eisenhower Presidential Library in 1989, I have done freelance lecturing both in the United States and western Europe on a variety of historical topics.

## Charles Crawford

### President 1973-1974

The decision to establish an oral history program at our institution, then Memphis State University, was made by the president, Cecil C. Humphreys, who had been a history major as an undergraduate and thereafter maintained a special interest in the discipline. Having previously given me several requests for tasks related to the development of the university, he appointed me to serve as director of a new program, the Oral History Research Office (OHRO), in 1967.

Our immediate problem was that neither he nor I had any experience or specific knowledge related to oral history. Obviously, learning was necessary. Accordingly, I quickly made trips to the Library of Congress and to Columbia University, both of which were immensely helpful to me. During this time, I learned of a conference on oral history which had been held at Lake Arrowhead in California, where a call was made to attend an organizational meeting scheduled for later in the year [1968] near Columbia University.

My trip to New York and up the Hudson River to the Columbia University conference center at Arden House began a new chapter in my life. The diversity and academic interest of the scholars assembled there impressed me greatly. It is difficult to express the sense of excitement and adventure of being present at the beginning of a new movement in history. Arden House, although too limited in space for subsequent, larger meetings, was probably the perfect venue for the birth of the Oral History Association. The center for the organizational meeting, as well as the spectacular views of the river valley were memorable. My individual contribution to the meeting was a mundane one. When Louis Starr asked if anyone present knew parliamentary law and procedure, I volunteered and served as parliamentarian at the organizational meeting. My recollection of who was present at various meetings is vague, but I believe those present included John Wickman, Amelia Fry, Samuel Proctor, Elizabeth Calciano, Knox Mellon, Carlotta Mellon (married Knox later), Willa Baum, Warren Albert, Gould Coleman, Waddy Moore, Charlie Morrissey, and others.

This auspicious beginning convinced me of the great importance of oral history. Fortunately, it also impressed the president of our university. The Oral History Research Office (OHRO) was given an office, a secretary/transcriber, an unlimited travel budget, and a half-time reduction of teaching duties which has continued to the present, except for a later limitation of travel funds. A fortunate part of the arrangement was the duty of the director to report directly to the president of the university. All subsequent presidents have been supportive of our program.

Writing without the records before me, I cannot be specific about the years I served as a member of the board, executive committee, officer, and president of OHA. My recollection is that the association continued to grow and our business was mainly handling the established activities. Those who served with me had such integrity and ability that my service with them was a pleasure. I believe I attended all meetings of OHA for the first twenty years and most of those afterwards, although I travel much less now. The last two meetings I attended were the ones at Durham and St. Louis. All the annual meetings were good ones, although the ones most memorable to me were Asilomar, California, Grand Teton, Wyoming, and West Point, New York. One activity of general contribution to oral history was our meeting on oral history procedures and standards at Wingspread, Wisconsin, in July 1979.

During the past forty-eight years, the OHRO at the University of Memphis has collected more than 3,000 interviews in several dozen projects. Some of these have been extensive, and some have involved interviews with only a few individuals. Maintained in the archives of the University Library, these interviews are now accepted as standard source materials for most publications on our area. They are also of value to student researchers. At present, I have successfully directed thirty-two doctoral dissertations and more than sixty MA student theses or other requirements. Many of them have been able to make use of oral history materials. We also offer a course in oral history in which every student is responsible for one or more interviews for one of our current projects.

Some of the representative projects include, “Oral History of the TVA,” “World War II Veterans History,” “Events related to the Martin Luther King Assassination,” “Civil Rights Movement in Memphis,” “Memphis During the Era of the Crump Machine,” “History of Women’s Athletics at the University of Memphis,” “End of the Solid South and Beginning of Two-Party System in Tennessee,” as well as various others. Most of these projects involve local or regional interviewing, although some are more extensive. The Tennessee Valley Authority Project required interviewing throughout the nation, in cities from New York to Sacramento, and states from Wisconsin to Florida.

In retrospect, I realize there was something very unusual about the OHA meetings. During the past half-century, I believe I have attended or participated actively in several hundred professional meetings, yet none of them have had the sense of discovery, enjoyment and genuine camaraderie experienced among OHA participants. We became lifetime friends, and some participated together in other programs given by different organizations. This activity was truly national. We met often in other venues, some of them even international. Sam Proctor is a notable example, being always ready to travel. We were on three programs in Canada, two in Puerto Rico, one in Mexico, and one in Venezuela. Early OHA meetings featured frequent parties, limited sleeping time, as well as the tradition of a midnight swimming party. I hope future OHA participants have as much fun as we did.



## **Donald A. Ritchie**

### **President 1986-1987**

An accidental oral historian, I stumbled into the practice after discovering that the subject of my doctoral dissertation, Harvard Law School Dean James M. Landis, had given a lengthy series of interviews shortly before his death a decade earlier. That oral history transformed my research from a narrow account of his federal government career—from the New Deal to the New Frontier—into a full-scale biography. But his oral history also left a lot of holes: Landis talked only about his achievements, not his failings, including the income tax case that sent him to jail. That imbalance inspired me to interview his family, friends, colleagues, the attorneys who prosecuted and defended him, and even his psychiatrist, who was willing to talk because he felt that the conviction had been a miscarriage of justice. Doing those interviews not only improved my dissertation and resulting book but paved the way towards my being hired to start an oral history program for the U.S. Senate Historical Office.

In preparation for setting up the senate’s program, I attended the Oral History Association colloquium held in 1976 at the Chateau Montebello in Quebec. It was an outstanding meeting in a stunning setting, full of energetic debate between the Canadians who promoted the merits of “aural history”—sound recordings—and the Americans who favored transcripts. Participants also took sides on the “top down” versus “bottom up” approach to interviewing. I learned a great deal, made some lasting friendships, and have continued to attend the meetings each year since then. By 1981, then-president Jim Hammack had appointed me to serve as program chair (in fact, I was the entire committee), and that led to my election to the council.

On the council, I served on a long-range planning committee that projected how the OHA could expand its membership and improve its services, increase its publications, and establish an endowment fund to ensure financial stability. At first our wish list seemed overly optimistic, but over the years each item gradually became a reality.

During my years on the council and as president (1982-1988), we discussed and began implementing ways to make the association more diverse, international, and accessible. We also weighed the needs for making oral history standards clearer and more relevant. As an extension of that effort, in 1988-90, I chaired the committee to revise the evaluation guidelines.

Before a wise constitutional revision took place, shifting the responsibility for planning the annual meeting to the first vice president, OHA presidents had to devote the largest share of their attention to the meeting. Mine



met in St. Paul, Minnesota, where I enjoyed the great advantage of having it run by the team of Lila Goff and Jim Fogerty. Whenever a problem developed, they had already anticipated it and solved it in advance. Our coup that year was the up-and-coming young documentary producer who wowed a plenary session—that was Ken Burns before *The Civil War*.

I learned a great deal about oral history, organizational management, baseball, and other essential matters from fellow OHA presidents Cullom Davis, John Neuenschwander, and Ron Marcello, and many other oral historians, both in the United States and around the world. Anne Campbell served as executive secretary back then and became Anne Ritchie when we married. She later served as OHA president, and both of us have been officers in the International Oral History Association. We discovered that no matter how widely the subject matter may differ from country to county, a common oral history methodology unites us.

Beyond the social and professional connections, oral history changed the way I researched and wrote history. Learning to listen to interviewees reshaped my thinking about much of the past and worked its way into the books that I wrote. Transcribing interviews improved my writing style by making me more aware of the rich variations of the spoken word, as opposed to more formal prose. I incorporated oral history into textbooks, exhibits, and website material, and pulled together my observations and experiences into a manual, *Doing Oral History*. A stint as editor of the Twayne oral history series, and later as senior advisor to the Oxford oral history series, provided opportunities to help other oral historians turn their interviews into books.

All told, stumbling into oral history proved to be a consequential accident, and participation in the Oral History Association became my most valued professional connection.

For a video recollection, please visit <http://goo.gl/uKpdqQ>.

## Thomas Charlton

### President 1990-1991

[This essay was extracted and edited from a longer interview with Charlton conducted by Gerald Saxon in 2000 and 2001.]

On doing oral history as part of his master's thesis at the University of Texas on the Texas Department of Public Safety in 1962:

[I wanted] to interview the individual who was the author of the bill that had created the Texas Department of Public Safety. That was none other than Allan Shivers, so I went to Shivers's office with my heavy Webcore tape recorder under my arm at the appointed time one morning, and I was ushered into Shivers's office. He came from around his desk, and I had my notes with me in my left hand and my recorder in my right hand, and he said something to the effect, "So you're the young man who wants to talk to me about the Department of Public Safety." And he looked down and he saw that I had something in my hand; he said, "Let me see what you have there, boy." And so he took the notes out of my hand. Governor Shivers looked at my outline that I had, he said, "Let's see, the first thing you're going to ask me about, I don't remember much about that. The second thing, I don't think we have time to go into that today. The third thing is—you don't want to hear about all that, that's not very interesting. The fourth thing..." and he went right down my interview outline and just blew me out of the water completely. And he said, "I suppose that's about all, Mr. Charlton, thank you for coming by." And he shook hands with me and ushered me out the door. So it was my most disastrous oral history interview in my whole life, I guess you would say. I wondered to myself, Will I ever in my life be able to interview anyone who's very prominent and have a successful interview?

On being hired at Baylor, setting up the Institute for Oral History, and joining the OHA:

I remember arriving [at Baylor University] on the second of July in 1970. My job was to try to figure out how I would work with the special collections library. I knew there would not be any oral history immediately, but in the back of my mind I thought, just as soon as possible, I should do some oral histories.



One day I decided I would go visit with President McCall and just ask, “What do you have in mind for me to do at Baylor?” He said, “I want you to get out and interview all the old judges of the state—all those Supreme Court justices in Texas have never revealed very much about their careers—and I want you to find other niches where you could bring in twentieth-century materials to Baylor. We’re probably going to have to do it by interviews because [your predecessor] Guy B. Harrison focused on the nineteenth century at the Texas Collection. I’m counting on you to bring in new collections on the twentieth century.”

The history department across the street had been gathering material about the Columbia University oral history office for ten or fifteen years. [Department Chair] Dr. Bruce Thompson had an entire file cabinet drawer full of things about Allan Nevins and all of the reports about the Columbia office and their work in the Northeast. He gave me the entire file drawer one day and said, “See what you can make of all this.” We put together an ad hoc committee very quickly. We knew a little bit about some other oral history activity in this part of the United States, and we said, “My gosh, there’s a lot that Baylor could do if we could get organized and find any funding for it.”

About the first of October, three or four of us marched ourselves over to meet the vice president, Herbert H. Reynolds, and just kind of laid this idea out on his desk. We said, “President McCall thinks we need to do some of this; we think so, too. We think we could do some economic history; we could do some social and cultural history. We think there are a number of things to do in legal history here in the state of Texas, if not outside.”

Reynolds drummed his fingers on his desk for about fifteen seconds, and he said, “I can see that this is something that a good university ought to be doing.” And he said two more things that were just extremely defining. One was, “Who can direct it here at Baylor?” I was the new kid on the block with no committee assignments, who didn’t even know what he was going to teach over at the department, and the other guys looked at me and said, “What about Charlton? How about putting him in charge of it?” And Herbert Reynolds, who didn’t know me very well, wrote down my name. He also said, “I’m setting up a budget for you this afternoon. Go see what else you can find in terms of money from other budgets on campus.” And he said, “Get some grant writing going.” And we immediately wrote a grant proposal to the NEH [National Endowment for the Humanities], which we hit on, and that brought in about \$50,000 immediately to set up several more things.

By the end of that year we had an office set up. I was in New York visiting at Columbia University. I was up in Denton visiting Ronald Marcello and picking up many of his system concepts. Ron Marcello was extremely generous with all of their procedures for processing their tapes and transcripts. I was in California at Cal State-Fullerton, visiting them. It felt like I was in on the cutting edge of something really new.

I joined the Oral History Association in the fall of 1970. I went to my first national meeting that fall, which was in California, the Asilomar State Beach and Conference Grounds meeting. I must say that it was extremely inspiring—I could not begin to tell you how excited I was when I came home. We had just created the oral history program at Baylor, and two months later I was with all of the people across the nation, from the Columbia University crowd to the Berkeley and UCLA crowd, and that convinced me that we were on the right track here.

So I decided then that I would work in the Oral History Association as much as I could. Within two years’ time, I was very fortunate to be asked to speak in their workshop sessions. I found myself involved almost every year from then on in some way. I was on the planning meetings for the 1972 annual meeting, which were in Austin. That was the big meeting when we had Alex Haley as the featured speaker, and boy, did that blow all of our minds. His ABC television miniseries on *Roots* had just begun, and the book was coming out. And I kept coming back to Baylor saying, “We can do this; we can do this.”

But it was not until the late ‘70s that I took a significant step in involvement. Alice Hoffman, who was president at that time, asked me if I’d be interested in editing the *Oral History Association Newsletter*. It was a quarterly newsletter at that time, and it had been based at UCLA. I thought, Wow, Baylor to succeed UCLA? That seemed like heady stuff. We began to make some changes in the *Oral History Association Newsletter*. We began to include more photographs of activities, and then we also began to publish articles and not just report who had been elected. We began announcing when new oral history projects started anywhere in the United States, particularly on college and university campuses. The tone of each little article would be, “Wow, they’re now doing it over there!” We did hundreds of those little articles. The “oral history movement,” as we called it back in the ‘70s, was just rolling. I felt like a cheerleader for the OHA and for oral history research and for humanities research at the local level in particular. I think that lasted about eleven years.

At the national meeting when I was elected the newsletter editor, Ron Marcello had only recently become the executive secretary, and there was a reported story about Louis Starr, of Columbia University. After the meeting he was thinking about the fact that now the headquarters of the OHA would be in Denton, and the newsletter would be at Baylor University. He turned to a friend of his, not many feet from where Ron and I were sitting, and he said, “Denton and Waco—what will they say at Princeton?” I think the message there was that something was shifting. The power structure had been around New York City at first, and on the West Coast to a certain extent. Now the leadership would be found in the middle of the country. That was interesting to me, and I took some pleasure in that.

On serving on the executive council from 1983-1986 and then being elected as vice president in 1989 and president from 1990-1991:

The council was not as new to me as I thought it would be because I had already been attending their meetings as the editor, but it did put me on the inside in the budget planning part of the OHA. And the work on the council had its own little committee structures. Each council member was to work with certain committees across the nation. I became a student of the leadership of the OHA in earnest at that point. I could see there was a little bit of a “power structure” in the association, largely based on the charter members of the association.

The year I served as president was the year we were to meet in Utah, at the Snowbird Ski Resort, outside Salt Lake City. We were meeting in a state that had, I think, only about five to ten members of the Oral History Association. I was really nervous that the site selection committee had chosen a place where I would have a very unsuccessful national meeting, so I made several trips out to Salt Lake City to meet with local arrangements groups. My question was, if there were not very many OHA members around there, could we hook a lot of new people who might come? Could we find several hundred people who had never been to an oral history meeting, so that we would have a respectable meeting, and maybe validate the decision to choose that as the site?

Fortunately we had a good attendance. The weather was excellent that weekend. It was beautiful high up at 10,000 feet there at Snowbird, and I breathed a great sigh of relief when the meeting was over and a new executive secretary, Richard Cándida Smith, from UCLA, settled the financial accounts with the hotel. The meeting itself is a blur in my memory. There were so many little details to keep track of. I just wanted a smooth transition to the next person. The next person coming in was Terry Birdwhistell of the University of Kentucky, and the meeting was going to be in Cleveland.

In my post-presidential year, it was helping the nominating committee and helping the new president. I can remember e-mail was just coming in, and Terry and I kept the e-mail lines really, really busy. And I thought that was very interesting, doing business by e-mail. It really was new and I loved it. And Terry and I would check our e-mail two or three times a day, and so we saved a lot of money on long distance phone calls, I’ll say that. That was kind of fun to do that.

I have attended the meetings very faithfully. I have only missed two meetings of the Oral History Association since 1970, so I’ve been to about thirty of them. I continue to chair panels at the national meetings, to introduce speakers, occasionally writing a book review for the review or writing for other journals as well about oral history. And I would have to say that since 1992, ’93, I have been less active in the association, although I have been very interested. I still feel very passionately about the Oral History Association, and I read everything that’s sent to me.

## **Terry Birdwhistell**

President 1991-1992

I conducted my first oral history interview as a history graduate student at the University of Kentucky in 1973. That same year, UK Libraries initiated two grant-funded projects on the lives and careers of a former United States senator and a former chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. By summer of 1974, most of the grant funds had been depleted, after the library had conducted only three interviews. The projects needed an interviewer who could work fast and work cheap... I was their guy.

My first OHA meeting was Asheville, North Carolina, in 1975. I remember being so impressed with Art Hansen's presentation and many others. During one of the receptions, I met Carl Ryant, an oral historian at the University of Louisville who remained a friend and helpful colleague for many years. I was intimidated by such names as Willa Baum, Ron Grele, William Moss, Charlie Morrissey, and Enid Douglass, but I soon realized that OHA always worked hard to be a welcoming and inclusive organization.

Anne Campbell Ritchie, who had become an oral history colleague at UK through her work in the Appalachian Collection, and I decided to invite OHA to Kentucky. At the Burlington meeting we made our pitch, and after reassuring some East Coast council members that one could get to Kentucky, they accepted our invitation. The invitation carried more weight because Jim Hammack, another Kentucky oral historian, then served as OHA president.

Anne and I assumed we would play a major role in local arrangements for Lexington, but Cullom Davis, OHA president for the 1984 meeting, surprised us by asking that we take on local arrangements and the program planning. A natural innovator if not instigator, Cullom then persuaded council to move away from a workshop/colloquium format for the annual meetings to a more typical four-day conference that would still include workshop sessions.

By all accounts, the Lexington meeting proved successful and recorded the largest attendance in OHA history to that point. Dale Treleven put together a fabulous media component for the program, and Anne used her Appalachian contacts to bring in some of the best Appalachian scholars at that time. Kim Lady Smith, director of the Kentucky Oral History Commission, contributed her resources and ideas to the meeting's success.

After a three-year term on council and a year as vice president I became OHA president at the Snowbird conference. My meeting would be Cleveland in 1992. By this time complaints were increasing about the expense of the annual meetings making it difficult for many to attend. I was intrigued by how technology could expose more of our annual meeting programming to a larger audience. With this in mind, Baylor University, UK, and Cuyahoga Community College partnered to present a videoconference at the opening of the Cleveland meeting, featuring some of the nation's most prominent oral historians whose work focused on community history. The interactive *Communities, Diversity, and Oral History, A National Videoconference* was viewed at thirty institutions in seven time zones and for the first time shared the OHA annual meeting program with oral historians around the nation.

As do most OHA presidents, I spent the majority of my year working on the annual meeting. Support in Ohio at the time was meager, but I must thank Professor Ed Miggins at Cuyahoga Community College for his support of the videoconference. Likewise, the conference would not have succeeded without the hard work of my UK oral history colleague Jeff Suchanek, who assumed most of the detailed work for registration and local arrangements. Jeff also played a major role in the 1993 annual meeting planning and logistics for Birmingham the following year.

My experience as president convinced me to push for a bylaws change that would create a first vice-president position and place responsibility for the annual meeting with the vice-president. The OHA president could then focus exclusively on OHA priorities and representation.

Also, at the 1993 meeting in Birmingham I proposed, and council endorsed, establishment of an OHA listserv. The listserv was established at the University of Kentucky that year and included subscribers from a variety of backgrounds, including public historians, students, local historians, and university faculty members. OHA-L was eventually merged into H-Net.

OHA is different from the many other academic and scholarly organizations to which I belong. We should celebrate that difference and work during the next fifty years to assure that OHA continues to support oral historians from the community to the academy. Doug Boyd, Director of UK's Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, and his generation of oral historians have taken oral history and OHA into a new and exciting century with amazing technological developments. I cannot wait to see what happens next. Happy birthday OHA!



## Kim Lady Smith

### President 1993-1994

It was at the 1979 Oral History Association annual meeting that my career in oral history began. I wasn't there. I was in Huntington, West Virginia, where I was a twenty-four-year-old graduate assistant working with the Oral History of Appalachia program at Marshall University. The head of the program, Dr. Bob Maddox, attended the meeting where a colleague of his, Dr. Jim Klotter from Kentucky, asked if he knew of anyone who might be interested in a job as program coordinator for the Kentucky Oral History Commission (KOHC). A few months later I began what would be a twenty-seven-year career with the KOHC. The job evolved through various reorganizations with changing job descriptions and responsibilities, but heading the commission was the single constant until my retirement in 2006.

We've been asked to reflect on the role the OHA has played in our professional lives both as oral history practitioners and former presidents. Unquestionably, the organization was essential to informing my work as a professional in the field and to the programs in Kentucky served by the KOHC. However, my most vivid memories of OHA are the people I came to know. As a relatively small organization with a strong contingent of loyal members, it wasn't hard to develop relationships with those you looked forward to seeing year after year.

My first OHA meeting was at Tamarron in Durango, Colorado, in 1980. In that beautiful, though rather isolated, setting, I met many of the OHA colleagues whose company I would enjoy for years to come. It also began several years of travelling to OHA meetings with my Kentucky friends Terry Birdwhistell and Anne Campbell Ritchie, also past presidents of the OHA.

The 1984 OHA meeting was held in Lexington, Kentucky, with Terry as program chair and Anne managing local arrangements. I primarily helped with local arrangement, but also began working with the state and regional group at the request of then-president Cullom Davis. Those experiences led to my being elected to the nominating committee in 1985-1987 and to serving on the state and regional committee, 1986-88. I was elected to council in 1989.

Arriving in Boston for my first mid-winter meeting, I was quickly made aware of the serious financial vulnerability of the organization. We were operating in the red and were struggling to find more secure footing. Our reliance on profit from the annual meetings left us subject to forces often beyond our control. Thanks to a successful endowment effort led by Cullom Davis, immediate budget concerns were somewhat alleviated during this period.

Another ever-present issue was the need to grow membership. While its relationship to budget was obvious, there was a keen appreciation for building an organization that attracted and met the needs of a highly diverse group of practitioners. This was, and remains, a guiding principle of the OHA.

With my election as vice-president in 1992, I was to serve six straight years on the council. It was a significant commitment of time, but it did provide for some continuity during a particularly notable period of transition. From 1993 to 1995 the OHA was to have three executive secretaries from three different institutions.

I had enjoyed working with Richard Cándida Smith as executive secretary for the OHA during my years on council. When he resigned in 1993, I knew we would miss his organizational knowledge and experience. No person or institution was eagerly waiting in the wings to assume this responsibility. Jan Barnhart with the University of Mexico agreed to take the position primarily because the 1994 meeting was being held in Albuquerque and, as local arrangements chair, she wanted to insure that the OHA operated smoothly. By the summer of 1994, however, she announced that she would resign at the end of the year.

Fortunately for the organization, Rebecca Sharpless agreed to serve as executive secretary. The OHA and I owe Rebecca a tremendous debt for making the difficult transition to a new executive secretary relatively painless for the organization.

Annual meetings are always a priority for OHA presidents, and in 1994 the president was still responsible for the meeting held in their presidential year. Albuquerque was my meeting, but all credit for its success goes to Rose Diaz. She was an extraordinary program chair, and the meeting she planned and organized with the help of Jan on local arrangements was outstanding. An excellent program and location brought one of the highest number of attendees up to that time.

Specific details of the many administrative aspects of my time on council have faded over the past twenty-five years, but the people I remember with respect and affection. The late Lila Goff was president my first year on council, and I learned a great deal from her excellent example. My friend Dale Treleven, with whom I served on council and as vice president my presidential year, was a true pleasure to work with. Linda Shopes helped keep me focused and did an extraordinary job establishing the awards program for the OHA. Al Broussard, who served as president before me, is another long-time friend whose own hard work and example made my job easier. I also had the great luck to work with my friends Anne Campbell Ritchie and Terry Birdwhistell on council. Others with whom I served include some of the OHA's most accomplished members—Ron Marcello, Tom Charlton, Jo Blatti, Art Hansen, Alphine Jefferson, Laurie Mercier, and Cliff Kuhn.

I take pride in the small part I played in building the OHA through the 1980s and early 1990s, and it gives me great satisfaction to watch as young leaders take the profession to new levels of achievement. Several of those leaders are continuing Kentucky's tradition of service to the OHA, including incoming president Doug Boyd, council member Allison Tracy, and 2016 program co-chair and nominating committee member Sarah Milligan. I hope their time with the OHA brings them as much personal enjoyment and professional enrichment as my years with the association brought to me.



## **Anne Campbell Ritchie**

### **President 1995-1996, Executive Secretary 1985-1988**

“What’s oral history?” I asked when my colleague Terry Birdwhistell invited me to participate in a project. As curator of the Appalachian Collection at the University of Kentucky Libraries in the late 1970s, I had many opportunities to learn about the region, but it turned out that the best of these was using oral history as an interviewer for a Frontier Nursing Service project about the rural health care agency in eastern Kentucky. Terry also encouraged me to work on other projects, as well to develop resources for broadly studying and understanding the Appalachian region. One of the other advantages was that the projects gave me a welcome opportunity to travel.

The University of Kentucky Libraries thought it would be a good idea for me to attend the Oral History Association meeting to learn more about the field and interact with oral historians from elsewhere. I went to my first OHA meeting at Michigan State University in 1979 and have not missed an annual meeting since then. By 1984, I became local arrangements chair and a member of the program committee for the Lexington meeting, working with colleagues from around the state and the country to plan the event. OHA President Cullom Davis encouraged us to think creatively and work tirelessly to attract the broadest possible array of participants to the conference. Executive Secretary Ron Marcello provided careful guidance on every aspect of planning and financing a conference. We appreciated the opportunity to showcase Kentucky, since many of the participants had never been to the commonwealth before.

The following year I became OHA's executive secretary and worked closely with the association's presidents, council members, committee members, and meeting planners to insure that OHA business ran smoothly—not an easy task back in the days before personal computers and email. One of the main concerns during my tenure was OHA's financial stability. OHA depended on each annual meeting's income to carry us through the next year. Some years were a lot slimmer than others.

Serving on the council and then as president in 1995-1996, I continued collaborating with colleagues around the country to guide and expand the association. Coordinating the planning of the 1996 annual meeting in Philadelphia occupied much of my time as president. Philadelphia offered an attractive site that drew a record number of registrants. I counted heavily on Linda Shopes and Howard Green as program co-chairs, along with Pam Cassidy Whitenack and Mary Bear Shannon, who handled local arrangements, to offer a stimulating program with a lot of local events. Rebecca Sharpless, who was then OHA executive secretary, came through particularly on financial

matters and many other details of the association's business. It was during this time that the structure of officers and their responsibilities changed to free the president from the time-consuming task of planning the annual meeting. One of the things that pleased me most about the Philadelphia meeting was the very large participation by international oral historians, many of whom remain good friends.

Beyond OHA, I benefitted from working with Kim Lady Smith and the Kentucky Oral History Commission, and after I moved to Washington, [D.C.] I joined Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region (OHMAR). Later I began attending the International Oral History Association meetings and served on its council. It is surprising how often the concerns and issues within local and international organizations parallel those I first encountered in OHA. The Oral History Association helped me hone my oral history skills and provided colleagues worldwide. My service to OHA has been both a pleasure and honor.



## Richard Cándida Smith

President 1996-1997, Executive Secretary 1988-1993

I did my first interviews for research purposes in the 1970s. The Oral History Association was then in its first decade, but I never heard of the organization. Nor did I even know that what I was doing was “oral history.” Talking to people and making sure that the conversations had been recorded was often a challenge but something I knew I had to do if I was going to get a deeper, more complex story than what I was finding in other sources. I started learning about oral history as a distinct field in 1984, when I joined the staff of the Oral History Program at UCLA and then went to Lexington, Kentucky, for my first OHA meeting. The wonderful, I could even say wondrous, group of people I encountered in Lexington hooked me into a movement where I found many friends and offered me an intellectual home that has shaped everything I do, even if, on the surface, it has nothing to do with interviews or oral history.

Every year thereafter I looked forward to next year's meeting. In 1986, I convinced the program committee for the Long Beach meeting to invite Mexican writer Elena Poniatowska to be one of the year's plenary speakers. She spoke on interviews she was publishing on how people in Mexico City took charge of the rescue efforts in the massive 1985 earthquake after government showed it was incapable. Elena was the first of several international speakers I helped bring to OHA meetings over the years.

In 1988, Ron Marcello decided to step down as OHA's executive secretary. After discussion with Dale Treleven, director of the Oral History Program at UCLA, and securing commitments for institutional assistance from the campus, I applied to succeed him. The 1988 meeting in Baltimore began my introduction to the almost innumerable tasks that the executive secretary performs. The two biggest issues facing the organization during the five years I served as executive secretary were stabilizing OHA's precarious finances and finding an academic press that could take over production and distribution of the *Oral History Review*.

We were, and remain, an organization that relied on dozens of volunteers to organize the meetings, produce our publications, and serve on our committees. We prided ourselves on our exceptionally inclusive nature, reinforced by quite low membership and conference registration fees. We were more than interdisciplinary. We offered a place for professors, community historians, journalists, museum, and park staff, as well as freelance writers to



share their experiences. We were not a large organization, but we had grown to over 1,500 members, about a third of whom were based in academic institutions. We had high levels of participation, and we enjoyed a camaraderie that I found very different from my other academic associations.

But our finances were precarious. Every year I was executive secretary, we faced a several-month period after we had paid our bills for the annual meeting and producing the *Oral History Review* when our bank balances declined. At times, we had less than \$100 in our accounts, while we waited for membership renewals to come in. They always did, but every year I faced several months of uncertainty, wondering what I would do if a bill needed to be paid before cash flow returned to normal levels. In 1991 and 1992, during the darkest part of the post-Cold War recession, many of our members were suffering from the hard economic times. Far fewer people came to the annual meetings, and membership rolls declined. Universities cut back on the support they had been providing us, and publishers reduced what they spent for advertising in our publications and for exhibiting their books at our annual meetings. We had to figure out something to increase income or cut back expenses, or some combination of the two. Reluctantly, the council proposed a new membership fee structure. It was a difficult and controversial step because fees were significantly higher for many but compensated by a sliding scale that we hoped addressed the needs of a membership much more diverse than found in most academic associations. We also stepped up efforts to build an endowment for OHA.

We decided that we needed to partner with an academic press in putting out the *Oral History Review*. We were asking our editors to do an incredible amount of work. In addition to reviewing and selecting the articles published—already a time-consuming and challenging task for people who had full-time faculty appointments—they had responsibility for physical production of the journal, from layout to typesetting. They had to find and work with printers, and then, when the journal was published, they arranged for new issues to be mailed to our membership and library subscribers. I often wondered how Michael Frisch managed to do it, but he never disappointed us. We discussed our options with several presses before deciding, about the time I stepped down as executive secretary in 1993, to sign a contract with University of California Press.

I do not think I am exaggerating in saying that at times, OHA's officers, councilmembers, editors, and I all felt that as we solved one crisis, another loomed. Nonetheless, every issue of the *Oral History Review* came out on time, as did every issue of the newsletter. Our pamphlet editors kept finding greater writers to develop new contributions to the series. Our committees kept working to improve our professional guidelines and sharpen our understanding of the ethical issues our work entailed. Every annual meeting happened on schedule and the intellectual content was always at a very high level. We had a series of great plenary speakers, while international participation in our meetings multiplied. In 1991, the first participants joined us from what was soon to be the former Soviet Union, and Irina Shcherbakova, from the Center for Historical Memory at Moscow State University, spoke about doing oral history in Russia in the 1980s, when unauthorized interviewing was illegal and the police routinely searched homes for tape recorders and cassettes.

The late 1980s was also the time when OHA began evaluating how university research committees were implementing human subjects protection requirements for researchers working in oral history. In 1989, we had our first meetings with the office in the National Institutes of Health responsible for drafting federal guidelines. I wrote up an article in the newsletter summarizing what our members needed to know at that time. A decade later, when I was serving as president, I was back at the NIH, joining Linda Shopes and Donald Ritchie for meetings to clarify how oral history could fit into the human subjects protection rubric without undue interference with the close working relationship researchers using oral history must build with their narrators. As we all know, human subjects protection remains an ongoing, at times frustrating and divisive issue. It is valuable to know that OHA members have been working on this topic now for at least twenty-five years.

Overall, the efforts we took to become a bit more professional and efficient paid off. When I returned to the council as president elect, our membership had grown and our finances were more stable. We were still a diverse group, and our meetings were both fun and stimulating. The year I spent organizing the 1997 meeting in New Orleans involved a lot of work, but, not surprisingly, I look back at that meeting as one of the high points of my professional life.

Practical challenges never go away because they are an inescapable part of organizational life. OHA was a great place for learning what our priorities should be if we actually want to do our work better. We confronted our problems with a high level of camaraderie kept alive and healthy by a never-ending sense of humor that seemed to

infect everyone. Each of the presidents I worked with—Ron Grele, Terry Birdwhistell, Lila Goff, Tom Charlton, and Al Broussard—had a sense of deep personal responsibility to protect and grow OHA, which they expressed in their own unique and deeply personal manner. Each of them understood that the intellectual stimulation that OHA provided was its deepest source of strength. They never allowed the quest for efficiency to become an end in itself, more important than the challenging intellectual questions that engaged us in our publications, our annual meetings, and, for me, at every council and committee meeting I ever attended.





Linda Shopes (right) with Rebecca Sharpless.

## Linda Shopes

President 1997-1998

My entrée into oral history was Martha Ross's oral history class at the University of Maryland during my first semester of graduate school in 1974. But my enrollment in the course was precipitated by two rather personal impulses: through my involvement in the burgeoning women's movement, I had been turned on to women's history, and what I perceived to be rather dramatic shifts in my own class status had stimulated an interest in the context of my family's urban, immigrant history. Pursuing both within the context of the then-dominant social history paradigm simply *required* oral history.

I had heard about OHA from Martha—she spoke enthusiastically to our class about her participation in the organization. My *Newsletter* file goes back to 1977, so that is probably when I first became a member. The first annual meeting I attended was in 1978, in Savannah. By then, thanks to Martha's networks, I had become involved with the Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage project, a community project that had a large oral history component, and funds were available to pay for my registration and travel to the meeting. By then—again thanks to Martha—I had also become involved in OHMAR (Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region) and my own oral history networks were growing. I gave my first professional paper in 1980, at a joint OHMAR/Mid-Atlantic Folklore Association meeting, I believe in New Jersey.

As funds permitted, I attended OHA meetings through the late 1970s and into the 1980s. It's hard to say what attracted me to the association. As with my involvement in OHMAR, I think it had to do with finding people who were members of what I have come to term "my tribe," people who were excited about oral history as a means of democratizing not only the historical record, but also the practice of and audience for oral history; people who had come to oral history through some combination of academic interests, movement politics, and involvements in community-based historical work. (This was before "public history" was widely recognized as a field of practice.) I know OHA was riven with conflicts during those years over some of these issues, but they rather flew over my head. For me, there was an energy there, a passion for a new kind of history that cut across scholarly and social boundaries, that created real bonds among us "young turks" extending beyond the purely professional. While the intellectual and social context of our work has certainly changed over the decades, I believe the democratic, outward-reaching ethos remains the same for many of us. OHA continues to be my most important professional home, and many association colleagues have become valued friends.

I'm not sure how it happened, but in 1990 I was appointed to the *Ad Hoc* Committee on Principles and Standards, charged with updating OHA's Evaluation Guidelines. In 1986, Mike Frisch, who had assumed the editorship of the *Oral History Review*, asked me to serve as book review editor, an experience that was pivotal in my life, not only for introducing me to the pleasures of editing but also for the opportunity to work with Mike. In 1993, I was elected to the OHA Council; while I was on the Council, President Al Broussard appointed me and Art Hansen as co-chairs of the *Ad Hoc* Committee on Awards, charged with developing an awards program for OHA. In 1995, President-Elect Anne Ritchie appointed me co-chair with Howard Green of the 1996 annual meeting in Philadelphia. I was elected president-elect in 1996, with Richard Cándida Smith as president. I became president at the 1997 annual meeting in New Orleans and served through the 1998 annual meeting in Buffalo.

My memories of my year as president are scattered. I was the last president who also served as the person-in-charge of the annual meeting. If memory serves, the president-elect, then Howard Green, was to serve as co-person-in-charge. We'd developed a good working relationship developing the Philadelphia meeting, so it was fun to work with him again. But we had a lot of problems that year: the budget was in desperate straits, and the Council put in motion a process for a controversial bylaw change that would allow that body and not the membership to raise dues. Rebecca Sharpless, whose position at Baylor University included serving as the association's executive secretary and with whom I *loved* working, had announced that she was ending her tenure, and we were faced with finding both a new executive secretary and a new home. Bruce Stave, *OHR* editor, also announced that he was ending his tenure, though the problem of finding a new editor fell to my successors.

I tried to develop ways for the annual meeting to interact more deliberately with the local community by encouraging programming that would support local initiatives, involve local groups in the meeting, and bring the association into the community. Howard and I had appointed Debra Bernhardt and Cliff Kuhn as program co-chairs, and they certainly shared this sensibility. As part of the planning process, the four of us—Howard, Debra, Cliff, and I—travelled to Buffalo to talk with local groups and institutions. In this, we had a fruitful partnership with the troika of local arrangement chairs, Mike Frisch, Mike Niman, and Virginia Bartos, who also acquainted us with the Buffalo region. I'll never forget the marvelous tour of the city and of Niagara Falls that Mike Niman treated us to. Also, it was during the long drive to Buffalo for I believe the mid-winter Council meeting that Kim Rogers and I came up with idea of relocating OHA to Dickinson College and finding a local person to act as executive secretary. (Kim was on the Council at the time and a Dickinson faculty member.) While the actual transfer of the executive office and hiring Madelyn Campbell as executive secretary happened during Howard's tenure as president, I recall meeting with the dean of the college to discuss Dickinson hosting the association.

I also worked to advance both OHA's internal organization and the practice of oral history more generally. We spent the greater part of one council meeting moving forward with the long range plan developed under Anne Ritchie's leadership. I engaged with sister organizations like the National Council on Public History (NCPH) and urged OHA's liaisons to other organizations to actively promote oral history within those associations. I addressed not only OHA business, but broader professional issues in my *Newsletter* column. I tried to hold committees accountable and wished we could have supported at least the chairs' expenses to attend the annual meeting. And always I confronted the limited capacity of the association. Becca was already overextending the one-quarter of her time allocated to executive secretary duties, and money to support new initiatives was just not there. I had had this fantasy of meeting with regional groups, for example, to address common concerns and interests, but without travel funds that was impossible. And so, I felt especially gratified that we were able to expand the duties of the executive secretary during Madelyn's tenure and then hire a full time executive director in 2013.

And oh—how could I forget—in 1997 I began my nineteen-year and counting involvement with the issue of IRB review of oral history. In that year, Richard Smith, Howard, and I began what has been a continually frustrating conversation with what is now the Office for Human Research Protections (then the Office for Protection from Research Risks). Although progress has been made, the issues have yet to be fully resolved. But not to end on a down note—my experience with OHA has been one of the most satisfying, enjoyable experiences of my professional life. I'm grateful for it.

For a video recollection, please visit <http://goo.gl/4lBmR3>.



## Laurie Mercier

### President 1999-2000

The Oral History Association has played a critical role in advancing oral history practice, preservation, and scholarship in the United States, and so I'm happy to send a shout-out in celebration of its fiftieth anniversary. Anyone associated with the OHA—whether as a long-time member or occasional participant—knows that it is one of the most inclusive, helpful, and friendly professional associations. It strives to involve and influence oral historians across skill and discipline in a variety of institutions and communities. As a relatively small organization since 1966, its reach has been extensive due to the dedication and talents of a few professional staff and hundreds of volunteer members.

I joined the OHA in 1981 when hired as the oral historian for the Montana Historical Society. I had previously worked on several oral history projects in Tennessee, mentored by Charles Crawford of the Oral History Research Office at the University of Memphis, who urged me to attend my first OHA conference, held in Burlington, Vermont. As any newcomer to the OHA quickly realizes, I met an amazing group of people who were committed to oral history work and also lots of fun. For the next two decades I attended almost every annual OHA meeting, where I looked forward to renewing friendships and learning about the latest considerations of oral history methods, theory, and technology.

In the 1980s many of us worked on projects funded by states and humanities councils, even as funds available for community projects diminished. Influenced by the new social history, at the Montana Historical Society I helped develop collections that focused on industrial workers, women homesteaders, Native American educators, and community life. As part of the oral history movement, regional groups like the Northwest Oral History Association formed to meet and share knowledge with those not able to attend national OHA meetings.

The dedication of OHA members and the organization's commitment to democratic practice, interdisciplinarity, and greater inclusion kept me and many others involved. In 1987 I was elected to the OHA council as the association was diversifying its gender, racial, and generational leadership and worked with some of the legendary figures who guided the association through new challenges and changes, including Ron Marcello, Don Ritchie, Dale Treleven, Lila Goff, Sherna Gluck, and Richard Cándida Smith. A decade later, after serving on multiple committees, I was elected president under the then-new system of having a first vice president and then president-elect, which offered two years of "training" before taking on the executive role. As an assistant professor without tenure,

I may have been crazy to take on the presidency, but the experience strengthened my skills, broadened my understanding of oral history, and deepened my relationships with and appreciation of many OHAers.

My most indelible memories of that time concern the year prior to my presidency when the OHA was experiencing financial challenges and I was tasked with organizing the annual meeting in Anchorage. Fortunately my predecessors Howard Green and Linda Shopes, with the help of the late Kim Lacy Rogers, had just hired a new executive secretary, Madelyn Campbell, to work in the new OHA home at Dickinson College. Together Madelyn and I navigated the trials of our first conference with some humor and a lot of luck. Most OHA participants attend a fabulous conference without realizing what goes on behind the scenes. At the time, many of us feared that few people would travel the distance to Alaska, further indebting the association. Madeline and I struggled to keep costs down and negotiated a terrific deal with the Anchorage Hilton, which supplied A/V at low cost and provided breaks on meals and rooms. Thanks to the terrific program organized by co-chairs Bill Schneider and Sue Armitage, which featured many Native Alaskans, as well as the attractions of Alaska, hundreds did come to the conference, which turned a nice profit for the association and put it on a path towards greater income security and the ability to develop additional programs.

In the last dozen years I have attended annual meetings less frequently, but I still treasure my OHA networks and look forward to reading each fine issue of the *Oral History Review*. Oral history has been and remains at the center of my scholarship, as an important source for my work on labor, gender, and region. It has been gratifying to see the continued commitment of scores of members in leadership roles; the growth of the endowment, scholarships, and award programs; and the increased visibility of the association on the national and international levels.

Key to this recent success has been the support of Georgia State University, Gayle Knight, and the executive director. I know that many others have shared their memories of Cliff Kuhn in mourning his passing a few months ago. Cliff and I were old friends by the time he was elected to succeed me as OHA president in 1999, and although his energy and enthusiasm sometimes exhausted me (!) I never failed to appreciate his passions, commitments to social justice, astuteness, humor, and company. In 2011-2012, I served on the ad hoc committee, co-chaired by the supremely capable Rina Benmayor and Linda Shopes, to select a new home and new executive for the OHA. By then, the organization had grown more sophisticated, expanded its outreach, and was ready to hire an experienced oral historian to serve as director. How fortunate were we that Cliff Kuhn and Georgia State University entered the pool of applicants interested in hosting the organization. In a few (too) short years, Cliff took the organization in many positive directions. Moreover, he was the consummate public historian involved in all the key issues of the day. I remember a fascinating conversation with him about how he tangled with Georgia textbook and school board authorities over pushing for more inclusion of the state's racist past in its official histories. His devotion to expanding the reach of sound local and regional history took him to the airwaves, sidewalks, and community centers; he brought the voices of people into history and history to the people. That his tremendous energy, good work, and life was cut short has been a loss but a model to the rest of us to spend more of our days in pursuit of those goals.

## Rebecca Sharpless

### President 2005-2006, Executive Secretary 1994-1999

I came to the field of oral history backwards: through the written word. I started as an undergraduate student transcriber at the Baylor University Institute for Oral History in the fall of 1977, when I was nineteen. A year and a half later, after I graduated, the office manager's position opened, and I decided I would rather do that than teach high school English. I stayed in that position, which changed titles twice, until I was associate director and left to work on my PhD in 1987.

So I didn't do my first interview until 1982, when I took Tom Charlton's graduate oral history seminar as part of my master's degree. After that, I was off and running. I did a group of interviews on urban renewal in Waco for my thesis, and fieldwork became a regular part of my job. In the next twenty-five years, I did hundreds of interviews with people from virtually all walks of life. Closest to my heart, probably, are those with the women who had lived on Texas cotton farms before World War II, whom I interviewed for my dissertation.

Tom introduced me to the OHA immediately after I began working full-time at BUIOH. He was editor of the OHA newsletter, and my twenty-one-year-old self took my position as associate editor quite seriously. Being introduced to the national scene very early proved important in my development as a scholar. My first annual meeting was East Lansing, in 1979. Most of the OHA founders were still alive and in attendance, and I was able to see into the not-so-distant past and grasp the full scope of the association's work to that point. I credit that meeting with sparking my ongoing love for labor history, a new concept to me at the time. From later work on the newsletter, I learned about the Women of Courage project at Radcliffe College, led by Ruth Edmonds Hill, which set me on the path of studying African American women's history. So two of the main foci of my professional work came directly from the OHA.

One of the key attributes of the OHA, I think, has been the willingness of its officers to include new people in positions of responsibility. My first big job was organizing the workshop component of the Lexington meeting in 1984, and I will always be grateful to Cullom Davis for entrusting me with that privilege. I was elected to the council shortly thereafter. Don Ritchie had carefully put together an awards program, but as a newly radicalized graduate student, I wasn't buying what I perceived as elitism, and Don respected me enough to delay the implementation of the program for a while. I badgered Tom Charlton (by then my husband) into making me, with Jay Haymond, program co-chair for the Snowbird conference in 1991. It was a lovely meeting high in the Wasatch.

The most meaningful part was bringing Russian oral historian Irina Shcherbakova as a speaker at a time when scholarly exchanges between the U.S. and the crumbling Soviet Union were still uncommon.

I returned to BUIOH as the director in 1993 and the next year became the executive secretary of the OHA. To be blunt, I was not a particularly effective executive secretary—temperamentally unsuited—but we did manage to put on successful annual meetings in Milwaukee, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and Buffalo before I handed off the office to the imminently more suited Madelyn Campbell in 1999. I am most proud of the work that we did in increasing the OHA endowment, and I treasure the friendship with Linda Shopes that began during those years.

The OHA membership elected me as first vice president in 2004. By then, the planning for the annual meeting had shifted from the president to the vice president/president-elect, and so I designed the 2005 meeting in Providence with the able service of Pamela Dean and my old Baylor buddy David Stricklin as program co-chairs. During my presidential year, we did some good thinking about the position of the OHA in the world of professional organizations. We had applied unsuccessfully for membership in the American Council of Learned Societies (a goal finally attained in 2014), and a meeting sponsored by the American Folklore Society helped the OHA contingent—past presidents Al Broussard, Linda Shopes, Tom Charlton, and myself—think about where the OHA fit into the overall picture. During this period of the OHA, we also tried to have liaisons with other professional organizations and, occasionally, to co-sponsor sessions at other organizations' meetings. As OHA president, I relied heavily on the good counsel and bonhomie of officers Mehmed Ali, Kathy Nasstrom, and Mary Larson, as well as the unflappable Madelyn Campbell.

The OHA has meant a great deal to me as a practitioner and teacher in several ways. First is the discussion of the practice of oral history—how to do it well, thoroughly, ethically—which dominated the early years of the association and still continues as a core inquiry. Second is the search for meaning inherent in the interviews—not just what we do, but what it means. Sherna Gluck and Daphne Patai's edited volume *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* has remained a touchstone for me for decades now. I try diligently to convey the importance of both of those practices to my students. And, although I haven't actually done an interview in more than ten years, I still believe strongly in the value of a well-done interview, and I am grateful for interviews done by other people that I can use in my own research.

What has remained most important to me personally in the OHA are the relationships. When I moved to Atlanta in 1987 and wanted to do an oral history project on women and office-work automation, I called Cliff Kuhn, who I think actually knew every person in Atlanta. He quickly put me in touch with the head of the Atlanta branch of 9to5, and the project moved smoothly. Those interviews are in the archives at Georgia State, I am proud to report. And so it has been: oral historians are on the whole friendly folk, always eager to lend a hand or an ear. Thirty-seven years since my first annual meeting, I remain committed to the value of oral history in general and the OHA in particular.

## Alphine W. Jefferson

### President 2006-2007

Oral history, in one form or another, has always been a part of my life. Growing up on a farm in Caroline, County, Virginia, I listened to folklore, stories and tales of ghosts, haunts, and supernatural phenomena every day. Breakfast was a time for dream-sharing and interpretation as well as revelations of spirit visits, prophecies, and confessions of having been “ridden by a witch.” None of this seemed odd or strange to me, hence, I have always respected the spoken word because I often saw some of it come true in daily life. Listening to exultations, parables, sermons, and testimonies in a variety of Apostolic Charismatic, Holiness, “Jesus Only,” Pentecostal churches in Baltimore gave me deep respect for the many uses and value of spoken language.

When Mother Wright preached, “It is Nice to be Nice,” I heard her, and that simple message became my primary philosophy of life. When my mother, Ellie Mae Lewis Jefferson, rebuked the men in a heartfelt and spirit-filled testimony, I saw the power of the spoken word. After paying homage to the appropriate female and male leaders in the church that night, she changed her tone. With authority and strength, she spoke the following words to the men who had told my father to take away her driver's license:

Doug Jefferson did not give me my driver's licenses, and Doug Jefferson cannot take them away. Oh yes, by the way, I have two: one issued by the State of Virginia and the other issued by the State of Maryland. All is well in my home. I suggest you mind your own business and get on your knees and pray for yourself and what's going on in your house.

The entire congregation (including my father) was stunned. Being a very dignified and well-respected woman, there was no comment, rebuke, or response. Filling the chasm of the uncomfortable silence, one of the sisters started a spirited song in coded language affirming the place, power, space, and value of women. Most of them stood up instantly. The song was so moving that before long, the whole church was caught up in the spirit and standing. As a thirteen-year-old, I was amazed at how many women came up to Ellie Mae that night, and other times, and thanked her for speaking up. In a few years that church went from only two women in the congregation having a license to approximately five hundred. Therefore, oral history constituted a significant part of both my early education and socialization.



My first formal oral history experience was working as a survey researcher for an institute at Johns Hopkins University in 1968. I went to door-to-door with a lengthy paper document to which I had to obtain both multiple-choice and short-answer verbal responses. Some of the questions fascinated me then, as they do now. I remember asking people, “Would you vote for a Greek governor?” The follow up question was, “Would you vote for a Jewish governor or mayor?” From that moment forward, I realized the power of oral history to uncover people’s attitudes and biases as well as to provide essential information to advertisers and pollsters. That Spiro Agnew and Marvin Mandel became governors of Maryland had always affirmed the potential cynical and manipulative abuse and use of oral history.

As a Fellow in the Duke University Oral History Program, I took oral histories classes with Bill Chafe and Larry Goodwyn. Their skillful, though different, approaches to the discipline of oral history were instructive. Chafe saw it as a way to uncover the stories and voices of “the historically voiceless,” whereas Goodwyn advocated the use of informed and well-researched oral history for both advocacy and the preservation of the “truths” of the marginal and neglected in the American South in particular, and the national narrative in general. While at Duke, I served as coordinator of a Department of Commerce Black Land Loss Study throughout the South in 1974. The team of interviewers conducted thousands of interviews of Black farmers who were losing their land because of unfair and racist practices of the government officials in charge of agriculture and rural development. My ten years as a “church boy” and its orality became valuable tools as I tried to induce busy farmers to stop their work and talk to me, an elite outsider. Being able to talk about the Bible and quote scripture served me well as a vector into the lives of skeptical and justifiably suspicious people. I asked the women of the Gee’s Bend Quilting Circle to make me two dashikis. While talking with them to build acceptance and trust in their community, I demonstrated my sewing. They were both mildly amused and impressed with my whip stitch. Spending time with them reminded me of the year I spent with the women in Frog Level, Virginia. I heard stories and tales no little boy should hear when a December 31 birthday kept me out of the public school system. Their tales are being collected in a short story book entitled “Mosquito Smoke Stories.” Many of the tales I heard as a small child, when sitting under a tree while a fire in an iron barrel, smothered in damp rags, created a heavy smoke which prevented mosquito bites. Consequently, I have never doubted or questioned the validity of oral history as a legitimate academic discipline.

After interviewing several Vietnam Veterans in both Illinois and North Carolina, I had to abandon my first dissertation topic. I had collected data for a dissertation on how Black male camaraderie in Vietnam fueled the militant wing of the domestic civil rights movement. However, I had to abandon that topic when a Department of Army letter said, “Dear Miss Jefferson, we herewith deny you access to our non-existent race relations files.” Without access to the most important primary sources for my research, I had to find another topic. I still have, and continue to collect, oral histories from veterans. Their stories are compelling.

The Oral History Association attracted my attention because of its fifty-year quest to advocate for and professionalize the first type of history ever recorded. Oral historians, as storytellers, by many different names, were esteemed and valued members of many cultures and societies. These keepers of the collective memory embodied the first merger of education and entertainment. With facial expressions, hand gestures, physical items, griots (an Eastern European term), performed for rich and poor. Therefore, OHA has worked to recognize and support academic as well as popular uses of oral history.

I served as president of the association at the Oakland meeting. The program committee exhibited excellent judgment in organizing the meeting around the local and national histories of the unique location and social activism of the Bay Area. The meeting was well attended, and its most important facet was the consistent and frequent participation of members of the local community. I benefitted from OHA’s longevity, high quality leaders and members, and the diminution of academic hostility to the methodology and its acceptance and multiple uses by average Americans in their churches, clubs, families, schools, and social organizations. The only major challenge during my second term on the executive committee was the continued emphasis on making OHA’s leadership and membership base more diverse.

I am happy to report that at fifty, OHA is a very diverse and culturally sensitive organization. Executive Secretary Madelyn Campbell deserves a great deal of credit for transiting OHA from an unfocused, although well-intentioned, to a financially stable, highly structured, professionally recognized organization. OHA is the most cordial and collegial of the many professional organizations to which I belong. I have more long-term friends in OHA than any other collection of people with whom I associate. OHA is family; and, it is a family to which I will belong forever.

For a video recollection, please visit <http://goo.gl/EfMUZn>.

## Charles Hardy III

### President 2008-2009

My career in oral history began in 1978 when I drove down to a Catholic church in South Philadelphia. There, a social worker pulled reluctant senior citizens away from their after-lunch bingo game in the basement auditorium to share reminiscences of their lives with me, some young guy from Temple University’s Urban Archives, who was sitting behind a curtain on the stage. A few years later Alice Hoffman called to invite me to speak at the upcoming OHMAR (Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region) annual meeting at West Chester University—I’d never heard of it—about *I Remember When: Times Gone But Not Forgotten*, an oral history-based radio documentary series that I produced for WHYY-FM in Philadelphia. There, too, or soon after, I met Ron Grele. It was at a public radio conference in 1984 that I met Cliff Kuhn and conspired to meet up again at the upcoming Oral History Association annual meeting in Pensacola, Florida.

Wow! Bar-hopping with Halloweeners, beach volleyball, Hurricane Juan, and the opportunity to listen to and meet folks from all over the country who not only conducted oral history interviews but really thought about what they were doing. This was great! So I continued to return to OHA meetings and became part of an extended family. There, Alice and Martha Ross took me under their wings, watched over me, and made introductions. Ron made oral history intellectually exciting and became my greatest mentor and advocate, and Linda Shopes, a fellow Pennsylvanian, was always there for guidance and a sounding board for new projects. And then there was Brother Blue, the Divine Jester, to remind us in unbridled enthusiasm of the nobility of our work. Every professional organization needs a Brother Blue, but I bet only the OHA has ever benefited from one.

In the 1980s I loved producing sound works with aural history interviews, but it took way too much time to record them. If only these folks would record broadcast quality interviews, so I wouldn’t have to. This interest brought me in contact with David Mould, then the OHA go-to person on tape recorders and microphones. After David willingly relinquished that role to me—a role that I, with tremendous relief, would later relinquish to Doug Boyd—I year-by-year became more deeply enmeshed in the OHA. OHA annual meetings also gave me an opportunity to try out new ideas.

One of my fondest memories is from the 1987 meeting. That October I drove from Philadelphia down to Baltimore with four big speakers and floor stands, a mix board, and a four-channel open-reel tape deck to play and discuss “This Car to the Ballpark,” an eighteen-minute, quadrophonic, oral-history-and-archival-recording-based

“audio arcade.” As voices, music, and other sounds from speakers placed in the four corners passed through and around the room, I asked those present to walk around and move where their ears led them. Now this was fun!

In 2001 I was elected to council and over the next three years made new friendships, learned from how Art Hansen, Rose Diaz, and Kim Rogers worked with council, and became more invested in the association. In 2004, I thought my service was over. I had peaked, and could now move on to other things.

I was surprised then, when Cliff called me in 2005—or was it in 2006? —to ask if I would be willing to become the next OHA first vice president. My answer was no. As supervising historian of *ExplorePAhistory.com*, a state history website that was fully occupying my attention, I didn’t have the time, personality, or aptitude for the position. On the other hand... Well, flattery, assurances of assistance, and vanity soon got the better of me. After Ron spoke to me about the responsibility to serve as one grew older, I accepted the offer—and have been glad I did so ever since.

Then, as now, there was much to do and much to look forward to. After the tremendous success of the 2007 Oakland annual meeting, Horacio Roque Ramirez bet me a dinner that his meeting generated more money for the OHA than mine would. I needed help! Cliff and Linda provided sage advice on how to organize a meeting—I still share Cliff’s approach to fundraising, which was to ask people what the association can do for them when asking what they can do for the annual meeting—and Margie McClellan was the best co-chair one could ask for. Together we chose the Digital Revolution—big surprise, right? —as the theme for the 2008 Pittsburgh meeting. And to mix things up we introduced three new session formats: working groups, book discussions with the authors, and the first OHA digital and community showcase, which featured twenty-eight projects. The meeting offered workshops on both digital audio and digital video field recording led by Gerry Zahavi and Susan McCormick, digital preservation led by George Blood, and a hands-on workshop on authoring with digital media led by Mike Frisch. The presidential reception took place on a riverboat, with music provided by the Presidential Two-Step Old Time Song and Dance String Band, anchored by Mike on fiddle, Mary Larson on washtub bass, and me on mandolin. (My apologies to the other musicians whose names I have left out.) In line with the idea that the Digital Revolution was converging the interests of the many communities conducting oral history interviews, we hosted a National Council on Public History (NCPH) board meeting and invited participation from others groups, including the Association of Personal Historians and representatives from StoryCorps. Most memorable, and now a part of OHA lore, was David Isay’s talk at the Saturday awards dinner. For those of you who were not there and are now curious to know more, please ask someone who was. Or, as good oral historians, get multiple perspectives by asking a number of survivors. Unexpectedly, because of Pittsburgh’s distance from big cities, I did not have to buy Horacio a dinner.

When my official term as president began at the Sunday business meeting on October 19<sup>th</sup>, I had already been serving enjoyably as co-president of the OHA, since Mehmed Ali had taken a job with the State Department and moved to the Green Zone in Iraq some months earlier. Under Madelyn Campbell’s careful oversight, the OHA was in such good shape financially that council had the opportunity to increase funding for the Emerging Crises Fund Research Grants, scholarships to students and international presenters attending the annual meeting, and to support other OHA initiatives, including a new website. In 2008 the OHA website was little more than a placeholder. Through Dean Rehberger, MATRIX at Michigan State agreed to design and host a new multifaceted website for OHA with loads of bells and whistles. We also began discussions of the MATRIX proposal that would become the “Oral History in the Digital Age” project and website. Less progress, however, was made in our efforts to grow membership and to promote diversity in both OHA’s membership and leadership.

For me, one of the highlights of the 2015 Tampa meeting was Young Mind Readers Theater’s performance of Slave Narratives and Folklore, based on source material drawn from the work of Stetson Kennedy. Their performance reanimated for me the importance and power of oral history, and my gratitude for the opportunities for service that the OHA has provided me. It was Al Stein who had made the arrangements for Stetson to come to the Pittsburgh meeting to serve as the commentator for the Federal Writers Project plenary session, and it was Al who then made the introductions that led to the creation, while I was OHA president, of the Stetson Kennedy Vox Populi Award, first given in 2010, to David Dunaway, and then in 2011 to the Nakba Archive for its interviews with Palestinian refugees.

So what has the Oral History Association meant to me? When I attended the Tampa meeting last fall I was accompanied by three companions from West Chester University: digital historian Janneken Smucker and graduate students Kristen Geiger and Suzanne Irvin. Fearful of being treated as outsiders, Kristen and Sue were surprised

and delighted by the warmth of other attendees. Janneken, too, quickly made friends and met new collaborators. I have now reached the age where I spend most of my time hanging out with old friends and new. Each annual meeting, as they have now for thirty years, also provides me a crash course in ever-changing oral history practice, and a much needed and deeply appreciated burst of energy that fuels new projects.

In January, while attending the annual meeting of another professional association—which shall remain nameless—I experienced again the old, familiar, claustrophobic discomfort that I have so often felt at academic meetings. Too hierarchical. Too competitive. Too...? This meeting reminded me, again, of why I like the OHA. It is, at its core, egalitarian. We are high school teachers and students, librarians, archivists, community organizations and organizers, documentarians, activists, government workers, writers, academics from a broad range of disciplines, family historians, public historians. We come from the private as well as the public sector. Spending time and really listening to others is at the heart of our work. And so, on the whole, we tend to be a friendly lot.

For a video recollection, please visit <http://goo.gl/UQ8VQy>.



## **Rina Benmayor**

President 2010-2011

In the winter of 1982, I arrived in New York City to a new job at the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College (CUNY). My charge as a research director for culture and the arts was to develop oral history work on the Puerto Rican migration to New York. Although my training was in Spanish literature, I had conducted folklore field research projects—but I was clueless about oral history. I'm not sure I even knew what it was. Timing is everything, however. A friend from California suggested I contact a friend of hers who had recently moved to New York to direct oral history research at Columbia University. And so I met Ron Grele! The seminars, summer institutes, and international meetings that Ron organized in the 1980s and 1990s were my training ground in the field—how lucky was I!

These were exciting times for oral history. The Columbia Oral History Research Office was *the* intellectual crossroads for local, national, and international oral historians and theoretical work. Sandro Portelli gave one of the first seminars on Luigi Trastulli. Jack Tchen introduced the New York Chinatown History Project, inspiring our collaboration around the shared experiences of Puerto Rican and Chinese garment workers, and many other projects from then on. And I learned oral history interview practice from the master.

Soon after, I became involved in national and international oral history. My first OHA meeting was in Baltimore (1988), and with it my first incursion into OHA organizational politics. A group of us, including Andor Skotnes, Warren Nishimoto, and Jack Tchen, proposed the establishment of a committee on multiculturalism, aimed at making the OHA more ethnically diverse. I'm happy to say that this effort bore fruit, with much insistence, and is ongoing thanks to the continued work of the renamed Diversity Committee, which is a much happier title!

One year earlier, I attended my first oral history conference in 1987—the international meeting, in Oxford, England. I met Paul Thompson, Mike Frisch, Luisa Passerini, and Janis Wilton from Australia, with whom I would share many future adventures in the IOHA [International Oral History Association]. Although most of the presenters were historians, the themes of memory, myth, and interpretation of narrative resonated with my background in literature and encouraged me to pursue this new interdisciplinary field.

In the early 1990s, Columbia hosted the second international meeting in New York. Many Mexican, Brazilian, and Argentinian oral historians attended, sparking the creation of a Latin American network and offering post-colonial perspectives in oral history theory and practice. It was a wonderful conference and I have fond memories of guiding a sizeable entourage across Manhattan and down to Little Italy for dinner one evening. These international encounters sparked my involvement in the International Oral History Association, serving as its president from 2004-2006. They also led to the publication of *Migration and Identity*, co-edited with Andor Skotnes, and the more recent *Memory, Subjectivities, and Representation: Approaches to Oral History in Latin America, Portugal, and Spain* (Palgrave 2016), co-edited with Pilar Domínguez and María Eugenia Cardenal, all efforts that seek to build bridges between the scholarship of Spanish, Portuguese, and Anglophone oral historians.

In 2009, I was elected as Vice-President of the OHA. Co-organizing the 2010 Atlanta meeting was a real learning experience. I say co-organizing because so many others did the heavy lifting—the program co-chairs Dave Reichard and Tomás Summer Sandoval, of course Madelyn Campbell, and especially Cliff Kuhn as Local Arrangements chair. Working with Cliff was amazing—his connections were endless, his knowledge vast, and his energy boundless. Little did we know that three years later, the OHA would relocate to Atlanta with Cliff as its first executive director!

My presidential year, 2010-2011, was one of putting the house in order, beginning the search for a new home, and responding to the federal government's review of the Common Rule, which meant mounting a position with allied organizations and write-in campaign to exempt oral history from IRB oversight. The first few months of my tenure were spent attending to the standing committees, reconstituting some, establishing others, staffing them in appropriate rotations, and synthesizing and writing new charges for each. This was quite a task, considering that there were no fewer than fifteen committees, including awards, that had to be staffed with staggered terms.

Soon thereafter, my attention would turn to a more fundamental task. This was the year that OHA had to plan its move from Dickinson College, our happy home for many years. This moment of transition inspired us to make a huge organizational leap into creating the OHA's first executive directorship. Beginning in spring 2011, we formed a Transition Committee comprised of Linda Shopes and myself as co-chairs, Roger Horowitz, Laurie Mercier, Madelyn Campbell as ex-officio, and later on, Mary Larson, the incoming president. This was a major step for OHA, one requiring a very careful and intelligent, scaffolded process. By the end of my term in office, we had outlined the transition process, crafted a Request for Proposals, job descriptions for the executive director and program associate, advertised and vetted expressions of interest, interviewed prospective institutional candidates, and invited formal applications. In June of 2012, we finalized a contract with Georgia State University and Cliff Kuhn as executive director. It was a very happy outcome, and one sadly interrupted by Cliff's untimely death. I am very proud of the work the Transition Committee accomplished, and I'm honored to have had the opportunity to contribute to the OHA's growth and future. As the organization once again faces a leadership transition, it does so from a position of experience.

Today, the OHA is my primary professional organization and intellectual community. Prior to the OHA, I had never experienced a professional environment in which people were not trying to one-up each other in order to climb into a job or get tenure. No one gets tenure in oral history (at least not so far) and that, perhaps, is why the OHA remains such a friendly, open, and supportive community of people who love talking to and learning from others, across disciplinary and other divides, in an honest, democratic, and humane manner.

For a video recollection, please visit <http://goo.gl/1m44Q7>.



## Mary Larson

### President 2011-2013

As has been the case for many of my colleagues, I backed into oral history. All of my academic background is in the field of anthropology, and while I had training in all of the sub-fields, I had started my professional life as an archaeologist. When budget cuts impacted my job with the USDA Forest Service in 1990, I washed up on the shores of the Alaska and Polar Regions Department at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, where I was incredibly fortunate to be able to work with Bill Schneider and Project Jukebox. Since Bill is also an anthropologist, his approach to oral history made perfect sense to me, and my thinking about the methodology was very influenced by his perspective on things like interviewing technique, context, and ethics.

I first became aware of the OHA when Bill asked me to help present a workshop that he and Pamela Hanson were leading at an annual meeting. That was in Milwaukee in 1995, and I immediately became a convert. As many others have noted in these pages, I felt like I had found “my people,” and the meeting was the most collegial and congenial professional conference that I had ever attended (or would ever attend, frankly). While I helped co-present another workshop the following year, I think that my first significant involvement with the organization was when I became a member of the H-Oralhist editorial board in 1998 and, at about the same time, began to serve as the media review editor for the *Oral History Review*. After that, the OHA became my main focus in terms of professional organizations, and it has been my intellectual home ever since.

I was a member of Council from 2003-2006 and then got elected as first vice president in 2010. While I would then have been president beginning in 2012, my term was complicated somewhat by the fact that the standing president in 2011 resigned due to health reasons just a week into his term. As a result, I actually ended up serving two terms, and because of the way our bylaws are written, I was both the vice president and president during my first year.

Since my presidency occurred during a large organizational change for the OHA, most of my term was consumed with related issues. During my first year, the transition committee (very ably steered by Linda Shopes and Rina Benmayor) was leading a search for a new home base, and at the same time we were preparing to move to a new leadership model with the associated hiring of an executive director. While Rina and Linda and their committee handled most of the moving parts for the selection of a new headquarters and the executive director, and executive secretary Madelyn Campbell prepared records and manuals and other details for the move itself, I was

involved in parts of all of this. As the president straddling the two systems, I was very lucky to have been able to work closely with Madelyn as well as with our new leadership team when they were put into place.

The OHA was extremely fortunate to land at Georgia State University, with Cliff Kuhn as our executive director and Gayle Sanders Knight as our program associate, and that all fell into place in January of 2013, during my second term. Cliff hit the ground running, and as executive director, he was able to engage in a range of outreach and development activities that past presidents had been unable to involve themselves in because of time constraints. Council also took this liminal period as an opportunity to reflect on some of our priorities, and we began a strategic planning process led by consultant Janet Rechtman that would extend past my term.

The one focus of my presidency that was unrelated to the transition was the Boston College case, in which a restricted oral history collection at Boston College was subpoenaed by the Police Service of Northern Ireland in the course of a criminal investigation. While this particular court case was very specifically bound by a range of international laws and mutual aid treaties, there was an ongoing concern that as it moved to the U.S. Supreme Court it would seriously impact the practice of oral history in the United States and elsewhere. While council chose not to make any statements on the case, we needed to stay constantly updated on the various developments, and John Neuenschwander was an invaluable legal guide for me and for the organization during this time.

I count myself lucky that I have always been surrounded by wonderful colleagues in the OHA, and while I have mentioned a number of them already, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge just a few of the other people who made my time as president easier. When I was organizing the meeting in Cleveland, I was blessed with Elinor Mazé and Chuck Bolton as program co-chairs, Mark Tebeau as local arrangements chair, and Jeff Corrigan as workshop chair, all of whom served with distinction. I received a great deal of help from Rina, who preceded me as president, and from Stephen Sloan, who followed me and who was responsible for pulling together the wonderful conference in Oklahoma City. There were also others who served to inspire me and keep me going when things got a little adventurous, and I hope that they will all recognize themselves in this statement and know that I am eternally grateful.

The OHA has been a professional and intellectual home for me over the years, which is especially important for those of us who work in very interdisciplinary settings. More than that, though, it has been a place where I have made deep and lasting friendships, and the annual meetings are more of a homecoming for me than anything. I also love what the OHA stands for—its democratic impulses, its emphasis on ethics, and its creative nature—and the fact that it does stand for something meaningful has been why I have supported it for most of my professional life. I cannot wait to see what the organization does in the next fifty years.

For a video recollection, please visit <http://goo.gl/LQutl8>.

## Stephen Sloan

### President 2013-2014

1. How did you first enter the field of oral history?

My first interview was in my MA program at Baylor University. In taking a seminar on the Vietnam War, I had the opportunity to visit with a local man whose family had escaped from South Vietnam with the fall of the country in 1975. His family eventually resettled in Waco, where he opened a Vietnamese restaurant.

2. What attracted you to the Oral History Association?

The opportunity to interact and learn from the big tent of practitioners that the OHA represents. There is no stereotypical oral historian. One expression of this is the democratic, egalitarian, and open nature of our group.

3. When did you serve as president of OHA, and what was the cultural, economic, and political climate of the organization during your tenure? Did the role of the president change in that period?

My presidency was the first full year with the new Executive Office, which was of great benefit to me, but also a time of transition and of setting new initiatives and policies in place. We were professionalizing the operation of the organization in many ways, in ways that the organization did not have the capacity to do in past years.

4. What were some of the challenges OHA faced at that time?

I think it was of a period of more opportunities than challenges, but growing membership and increasing annual meeting sponsorships were always issues.

5. What were three areas you focused on as leader of the organization?

We ran a large scale strategic planning effort, which included a survey of the membership and contracting an outside consultant. We revised the mission statement, articulated core values, and laid out strategic priorities.

During my presidential year we decided to take membership management back from Oxford University Press. That was an important change that provided control of membership rolls, provided new avenues of communication to the membership, and gave us opportunities to offer more benefits to members. We also initiated a discussion on oral history as scholarship that could be used by academic departments, tenure committees, and provost offices to aid in decisions of tenure and promotion. In addition, we hired an outside consultant to help us develop and employ a new logo.

6. Who were some of the key colleagues you worked with to accomplish your goals?

Mary Larson, immediate past president (x2)

Madelyn Campbell, outgoing executive secretary

Cliff Kuhn, executive director

Gayle Knight, program associate

Paul Ortiz, vice president

Troy Reeves, local arrangements chair, Madison meeting

Todd Moye, program co-chair, Oklahoma meeting

Beth Millwood, program co-chair, Oklahoma meeting

Lois Myers, Baylor Institute for Oral History

Elinor Mazé, Baylor Institute for Oral History

7. What has the organization meant to you professionally over the years?

It has been the place where I get to spend time with and learn from those that “get it”—those who understand the drive to record and present the diverse perspectives that surround those subjects we are passionate about. I have said before that the OHA meeting every year has the same single theme: “What is Oral History?” I like what that brings—a continuing discussion of our craft, no matter the standing of the individual in the discussion, and a sincere openness to new approaches, understandings, and applications. The OHA is a place of continual growth and a support system to press on in the work.