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IN THIS ISSUE

President's Letter | Directors' Column | Volunteer Spotlight
Opportunities abound to participate in fall OHA meeting
OHA Indigenous Caucus updates

PRESIDENT'S LETTER



By Kelly Elaine Navies

Recently I had the pleasure of returning to UNC Chapel Hill, to attend the celebration and symposium for the 50th anniversary of the Southern Oral History Program and the 30th anniversary of the Center for the Study of the American South. It was such a pleasure to reconnect with dear friends and my former adviser, emeritus professor and founding director of the Southern Oral History Program, Jacqueline Hall.



I decided to make it a road trip, as Chapel Hill, North Carolina, is only a few hours away from Washington, D.C., and I like having the time to meditate and listen to music while on the road. North Carolina is close to my heart. I began my oral history journey as a quest to uncover deep roots in the Western “Appalachian”* part of the state. Crossing the border from Virginia to Maryland, on a gorgeous spring day, this haiku came to mind:

*Carolina roads
Taking me all the way home
Blood soil n blue sky*

One of the many topics that crossed my mind was the important role of volunteerism for the success of the Oral History Association, which marks its 58th anniversary this year. OHA relies on the passion and hard work of committed oral history practitioners like you to serve on committees and hold elected positions on council. On behalf of the organization, I thank those of you who currently serve in these roles. I also encourage any of you out there who are interested to become involved. Please answer the call of the Nominating Committee!

I am so excited about the upcoming symposium on “AI in OH” which takes place from July 15-19. To be honest, artificial intelligence scares me a little. What are we doing, exactly? The proposals we have received show that many of you are asking the important questions the symposium will explore. Registration is now open! Hope to see you there.

Finally, it is not too late to participate in our upcoming annual meeting in Cincinnati. We are accepting Poster Presentation proposals until May 17. You can find links to register for the AI symposium and submit a poster presentation at our new website: www.oralhistory.org.

*Term coined by poet Frank X. Walker to describe African Americans in and of Appalachia.



DIRECTORS' COLUMN



By Steven Sielaff

Since the release of OpenAI's ChatGPT in the fall of 2022, artificial intelligence, or AI for short, has pervaded our shared discourse and lexicon. Myriad organizations and sectors are

at once hurriedly embracing and cautiously considering the impacts large language models and complex algorithms might have on their industries.

Oral history is not immune to AI's influence, and in certain cases the profession already contains examples of its effects on practice. We will examine AI in OH at a summer virtual symposium scheduled for July 15-19. You can register [HERE](#) for the 10 symposium sessions that week at which panels will delve into the structural and ethical aspects of applying AI to oral history work.

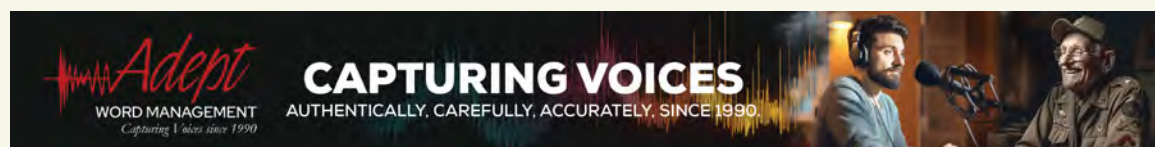
For this online symposium, OHA invited oral history practitioners and scholars from all disciplines who utilized oral history in their work to submit proposals detailing any number of intersections between artificial intelligence and oral history.

Each session is scheduled for two hours, with the last 30 minutes of each session designated for a robust Q&A time so attendees have plenty of opportunity to delve deeper into the theory and/or practice under discussion. We have also scheduled one morning and one afternoon session each day with a two-hour break in between so that everyone has a chance to fit at least some of this content into their weekly schedule. Your registration also gives you the ability to view all session recordings shortly after the conclusion of the event to accommodate asynchronous schedules.

In addition, we ask everyone keep their eyes peeled for a future announcement regarding a special pre-symposium webinar OHA will host for free to act as a primer for the content of the program. Regardless of your level of familiarity with AI or degree of technical proficiency in general, this pre-symposium webinar should be a helpful starting point for the topics and terminology relevant to the intersections of AI and oral history.

Finally, we would like to thank OHA Council for their support of this event, in particular their interest in creating more accessible OHA programming for a broad audience. We also thank the members of the AI in OH committee Jen Cramer, Patrick Daglaris and James Fowler both for their aid in constructing the program and for volunteering their time to serve as chairs of sessions. And last but not least, we thank OHA Program Associates Bethany Stewart and Hailey Vinson, as well as OHA graduate assistant Chiara Osborne for working so hard behind the scenes to turn this idea into a reality.

We look forward to seeing everyone online, and hope you enjoy the symposium!





Volunteer Spotlight:

ANNA SHEFTEL



This month, the OHA volunteer spotlight is on Anna Sheftel, co-chair of the OHA Advocacy Committee. She is an associate professor in the School of Community and Public Affairs at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. Here are her answers (lightly edited) to the **Newsletter's** questions about her OHA volunteer experiences.

How and when did you first get involved with oral history?

I first got involved in oral history when doing my doctoral research in the UK. I was interested in post-conflict memory and the role of memory in rebuilding communities and societies. I don't quite remember how I found oral history, but 20 years later it is still most of what I do!
How and when did you first get involved with the OHA?

I attended my first annual meeting in 2012 in Cleveland. I was immediately excited to find the intellectual community I had been looking for as an early career academic. In 2014-2015, Martha Norkunas and Sharon Utakis invited me to be on the organizing committee for the 2015 annual meeting in Tampa (which I personally had to miss because I gave birth a month before it!). Then in 2015, OHA President Paul Ortiz invited me to serve on the organization's 50th Anniversary Task Force. As a relative newcomer to the organization, these early invitations gave me a strong impression of how oral historians welcome younger scholars, and I was so glad to get involved.

What OHA activities have you been involved with? Why those particular ones?

I got involved in OHA in a sustained way through Oral Historians at Risk. I was at the 2018 OHA Annual Meeting in Montreal (my hometown), when I realized that we needed to build the capacity to support oral historians who are facing political or legal persecution for their work. I thought it essential, given the values of our field, that we act in solidarity and think about material ways to support those of us working in particularly precarious situations.

I mentioned this idea to Sherna Berger Gluck at the meeting, and she was immediately on board, and told me to come to the business meeting the next morning, in which she helped me propose the idea. A wonderful group of people, many of whom I did not already know, jumped on board, believing in the value of such a project. We worked to get it off the ground for a few years, and then, at the 2021 Annual Meeting, which was held online, the OHA overhauled its structure and bylaws and created a new committee: the Advocacy Committee, which would house Oral Historians at Risk among other initiatives.

Amy Starecheski, who had just become OHA president, asked me to chair the committee's first meeting, where we would properly elect a chair or co-chairs to get Advocacy off the ground. At the very first meeting, I had major computer problems and kept getting booted off the Zoom call. Once I finally made it back in, I discovered that I had been elected chair in absentia! Thankfully, Liz Strong agreed to co-chair with me, which has been a blessing. I am now in my third year as co-chair of this committee. Advocacy brings together initiatives related to

advocating for oral history and oral historians, such as: defending academic freedom, Oral Historians at Risk, and supporting independent practitioners.

What has been the most rewarding aspect of volunteering for OHA?

I have gotten to know a whole new community of amazing people who I might not otherwise have crossed paths with. I am Canadian and work in Tiohtiá:ke / Montréal, and working with OHA has massively expanded my networks. I really care about this field, and it is really rewarding to work with a group of people with diverse backgrounds, career trajectories, etc., all of whom also care!

What has been most challenging about OHA volunteering?

The nature of a committee like Advocacy means that most of our members are activists or people otherwise involved in their communities, in addition to their work, and so we are great at dreaming up ambitious ideas for how to tackle all the various injustices in the world, but it can be difficult to follow through. Everyone is operating at 110% capacity. It is really important to me that we build a culture of being gentle with each other, respecting how much people can and cannot contribute to a given initiative, not rushing, and making space for the sometimes messy way things come together.

What advice would you give to an OHA newcomer about becoming an OHA volunteer?

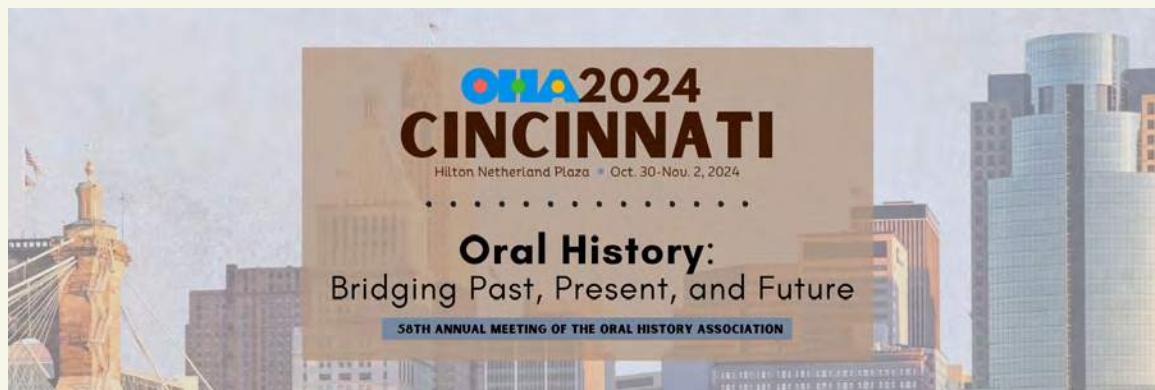
I would honestly just look at what interests me and get involved. I find OHA to be quite welcoming to newcomers, and at least in the circles I have been lucky enough to be in, there is little gatekeeping. The organization needs folks with ideas and energy.

Other thoughts to share or stand-out memories from your OHA volunteer experiences?

Times are tough for many of us right now, and I think finding community, and like-minded people who have your back, is key. OHA has been that for me, and in my own involvement in the organization, I really hope we can make it that for as many people as possible. I have had some really transformative conversations in our committee meetings, and so I am grateful to have had these opportunities to be involved.

Opportunities abound to participate in fall OHA meeting

By Ellen Brooks, 2024 OHA Conference Committee Chair



Thanks to everyone who submitted proposals for the OHA Annual Meeting, to be held in Cincinnati, Ohio, Oct. 30-Nov. 2. Notifications about proposal acceptance or rejection were sent out earlier in April. The Conference Committee received many amazing proposals, and

we look forward to putting together a diverse, flexible and exciting OHA 2024. Information about scheduling and scholarships will be forthcoming.

There are a number of additional ways you can get involved in the Annual Meeting! Right now we are accepting submissions for Posters ([Call for Posters](#)), volunteers to chair panels ([Call for Chairs](#)) and submission for other events ([Call for Events](#)), all of which have deadlines of May 17.

Additionally, student volunteer opportunities are available at this year's annual meeting. Job descriptions and benefits can be found here: [OHA Annual Meeting Volunteer Job Descriptions 2024](#). The sign-up form is coming soon.

Please check the [Annual Meeting webpage](#) on OHA's website for updates. Registration for the conference will open in May, and the preliminary program will be available in June. Questions about the upcoming meeting can be directed to Conference Committee Chair [Ellen Brooks](#) or the [OHA Office](#).

We look forward to seeing you in Cincinnati!



Four of the founding members of the OHA Indigenous Caucus shared their oral history experiences at a 2023 OHA conference roundtable. From left to right, they are: Winona Wheeler, Sara Sinclair, Francine Spang-Willis and Farina King. Photo credit: Farina King

OHA Indigenous Caucus updates

By Farina King, Caucus Member

At the 2023 OHA conference in Baltimore, our OHA Indigenous Caucus hosted a roundtable as an opportunity to introduce the caucus and highlight the purposes, goals and significance of the caucus. Winona Wheeler, Sara Sinclair, Francine Spang-Willis, and I participated in the roundtable. We shared our stories of how the caucus came together and our hopes to grow and support Indigenous oral historians.

In the spring of 2022, we voted to become a caucus within the structure of OHA. As the Indigenous Caucus, we also then drafted a mission statement with the following founding members: Sara Sinclair, Midge Dellinger, Francine Spang-Willis, Winona Wheeler, Rob Innes, Benji de la Piedra and me.

The Indigenous Caucus was created to:

- Provide a community of support for our practitioners by creating the space and time to network and share knowledge and skills.
- Through our connection, we strive to amplify Indigenous voices within the field and promote the sustainability of this work for our practitioners.

With support from OHA, our caucus hosted a Meet & Greet at the OHA conference in October 2022, and we later held a business meeting at the OHA conference in October 2023. We look forward to meeting again at OHA 2024 in Cincinnati.

The caucus was created to provide a visible and welcoming space for Indigenous oral historians to gather and support each other's work. We promote research and practice that

serve Indigenous people, communities and nations in and outside academic spaces, reservation/nation lands and Métis, non-status or unrecognized Indigenous communities. Since the Indigenous Caucus was founded, several questions have arisen about it, especially what defines us as a caucus. We organized the 2023 roundtable to address such questions and help all oral historians understand why the Indigenous Caucus matters, and we are happy to continue answering questions and connecting with more oral historians.

We are excited for the new funding opportunities and donations to support the OHA Indigenous Caucus and thank everyone for your support and contributions. You can donate to the Native American Initiative endowment through <https://oralhistory.org/donate/>. We will be in touch with more features about Indigenous oral historians and our work. Ahéhee'!



What would you like to see in the next OHA Newsletter?

OHA Newsletters are sent out five times per year. Have a suggestion for content for the newsletter? Email Mary Kay Quinlan at ohaeditor@gmail.com.

Interested in Advertising with the OHA?

Advertising space is available in 2024 OHA News Blasts and Newsletters. Reach out to oha@oralhistory.org for more information.

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