ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION
VOLUME XXV NUMBER 4
WINTER 1992

NEWSLETTER

Digging In, Pruning and Paring: The Recession Attacks Oral History at its Roots

BY L. ELISABETH BEATTIE

Many oral historians all too familiar with hard dollars turning into soft funds now face in this time of recession cutbacks severe enough to threaten their programs' continuation.

John Fox, Professor of History at Salem State College in Massachusetts says, "The oral history course we've offered at Salem for the past decade didn't make last year, and my annual summer institute in oral history struggled for lack of participants, too. People have retained their interest, but they simply can't afford tuition."

Fox adds that the oral history partnership arrangement his college had negotiated with Salem's business, cultural and political communities collapsed before it could begin, undercut by the Northeast's economic decline.

"I'm personally pursuing a project independent of the college with an insurance company," says Fox, "but other businesses that expressed interest in my working with them now say money is an issue and their oral histories are on hold."

University of California, Los Angeles, Oral History Program Director, Dale Trelevan, echoes Fox's laments. "The Oral History Program at UCLA has sustained budget reductions for the past two fiscal years," he says, "and that has had an impact on the program. Due to the economic depression in California, which has meant that the projected deficits at the state level are the worst since the Great Depression, there's more programmatic need than there is money. For the second year in a row the University of California is facing no faculty or staff increases. And for the second year in a row we've absorbed cuts in personnel and in funding, but that can't continue forever."

Because Trelevan's transcribing program is, in his words, "extremely labor intensive," he's thus far managed to save personnel positions by "finding enormous savings through careful assessment" of his materials budget and through "significantly" curtailing out-of-state travel funds.

"Except where we're able to obtain outside support, we won't interview people beyond the Los Angeles area," he says, noting that this regulation has already restricted the scope of UCLA's African-American Artists project, as several African American artists whom Trelevan would like interviewed reside in the East.

"The top priority for any manager is to reduce his or her budget to retain staff," he says, "but costs continue to rise despite government statistics. There is great disparity between the Department of Labor's statistics and state statistics based on tax withholdings."

Yet Trevelan views his and other oral historians' very real economic difficulties as "an opportunity to assess the relationship between modern technology and the way we do things." He states, "In any oral history transcribing program in which two-thirds of the time and cost can be absorbed by what happens *after* the interviews take place, we need to assess reduction of processing costs per hour of interview."

Kim Lady Smith, Director of the Kentucky Oral History Commission, comments, "In Kentucky we're looking at a very lean operating budget for fiscal year 1993. Our funding has been cut by 15 percent over the 1992 fiscal year, so of course the Commission will not be in a position to fund as many projects unless we tap new money reserves. I also think it would be safe to assume that alternate sources of oral history dollars will be difficult for oral historians to obtain.

Duane DeBruyne, Public Affairs Officer for the National Endowment for the Humanities, states that NEH funding for fiscal year 1993

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Recording the Recession

BY L. ELISABETH BEATTIE

Oral historians may be fighting for their fiscal lives, but a few researchers have turned tables on the times and taken advantage of this opportunity to record the recession's victims.

Marjorie Bard, Executive Director of Women Organized Against Homelessness (WOAH), and author of the book *Shadow Women*, has since 1975 recorded the stories of "hidden" homeless women, of formerly upper-middle class and upper-class women who have, due to the recession, lost their six-figure incomes or who have, due to abusive spouses, fled their home situations and ended up with nothing.

"Through interviewing thousands of women, I've come up with the concept of ideonarrating," says Bard. "That is, people refine their stories within themselves prior to relating their stories to others. Interaction begins not with dialogue, but with the stories people store in their heads. These stories don't change from audience to audience."

Although Bard attests that the only difference between her methodology and that of oral historians is that she doesn't "start out with a set of questions," traditional oral historians might challenge Bard's belief that stories don't change, just as they might suggest memories themselves differ with experience and perspective.

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From the President

Terry L. Birdwhistell

Following my last column was an announcement asking you to "Plan Ahead!" for future meetings. OHA will be going to Birmingham, Alabama, in 1993; Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 1994; and Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1995. Arrangements are made and contracts are signed this far in advance so that we can assure sufficient rooms and meeting spaces in hotels in those areas where we wish to meet.

We move OHA's annual meetings among eight regions of the country to make it easier for people from all regions to attend at least an occasional meeting in their vicinity. For the past several months, for instance, Joel Gardner has been exploring possible sites for 1996, when we are scheduled to meet in region 2, which includes Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia.

Over the years, some criticism has arisen in regard to OHA's site selection process and the types of meeting facilities we utilize. There is considerable difference of opinion over how an OHA meeting should be organized and run. Also, in our search for appropriate meeting space, we have faced increased costs for rooms and meals. These criticisms, especially of costs, are serious and merit careful attention.

What guidelines will OHA use in our search for a prospective site in the Mid-Atlantic Region? Ideally we would want a locale where there are OHA members willing to assist with the important work of local arrangements. We want a site that is accessbile to an airport and other means of transportation. I recall that when Anne Ritchie and I were trying to convince OHA to come to Lexington, Kentucky, for the 1984 meeting, one council member asked: "How does one get to Lexington?" We were pleased that over 300 oral historians found their way to the Bluegrass that year.

We also look for a meeting facility that can accommodate the number of people who attend our conference, both in terms of hotel rooms and meeting rooms, and that these rooms be accessible to persons with disabilities. Often we can find a facility that meets one need, but not the others. We also have learned that in order to secure "cost-free" meeting rooms, the hotels require us to schedule two or three meal sessions. In recent years, these meals have caused our conference costs to escalate rapidly.

Beyond these very basic requirements. OHA has tried to be sensitive to the social and political issues that impact upon our choices. In 1978 at Savannah, we debated the question of not meeting in states that had not passed the ERA. Just this past year, we found ourselves meeting in a state whose legislature enacted extremely restrictive abortion legislation after we had signed the contracts with the hotel. When a number of members voiced their displeasure at the business meeting, we adopted a resolution calling on the association to attempt to negotiate "escape clauses" for future hotel contracts.

During the Council's recent mid-winter meeting in Cleveland, I asked Council members to discuss the issue of site selection and to suggest ways to ensure that our conferences take place in accessible and acceptable locations that are as economical as they are possible. Suggestions ranged from going to only those sites where local OHA members invite us, to not aligning ourselves with any hotel for the conference, but arranging meeting space at a convention center or school and letting members make their own housing arrangements.

We would like to hear your suggestions about site selections for annual meetings. Perhaps as we work together on this complex issue we can arrive at some solution that will continue to allow OHA to hold meetings where members can combine stimulating sessions with comfortable social opportunities. This combination has given OHA meetings a uniqueness that we would not want to lose. I look forward to hearing from you — and to seeing you in Cleveland.

OHA Newsletter Editors Selected

The OHA Publications Committee has completed its search for new leadership for the OHA Newsletter. At its Mid-Winter Meeting in Cleveland, the Council formally approved the committee's recommendations.

Linda Elisabeth Beattie, of Elizabethtown Community College (Kentucky), and Dan K. Utley, of Baylor University, were named editor-in-chief and managing editor, respectively. Beattie is an assistant professor of English and journalism at Elizabethtown Community College, while Utley is oral historian/editor at Baylor's Institute for Oral History.

Utley has been serving as acting editor of the OHA Newsletter since last October. He is the former director of research for the Texas Historical Commission and is the current president of the Texas Oral History Association. He holds a B.A. from The University of Texas at Austin and an M.A. in history from Sam Houston State University.

Beattie is a graduate of Beloit College, Wisconsin, where she received one of the first undergraduate degrees in oral history. She also holds an M.A. in magazine journalism from the S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communication, Syracuse University, and an M.A.T. in English from the University of Louisville. This year she plans to enter Spalding University's doctoral program in Educational Leadership. She has wide experience as a freelance writer and directs student publications at her college in Kentucky. She also edits the educational newsletter, *Quality First*. In addition, she is director of the Kentucky Writers' Oral History Project.

As a result of the staff changes, news items, announcements, reviews and editorial matters should be addressed to L. Elisabeth Beattie, OHAN Editor-in-chief, Elizabethtown Community College, 600 College Street Road, Elizabethtown, KY 42701. Inquiries regarding memberships, changes of address, subscriptions, and deliveries should still be directed to Richard C. Smith, Secretary, Oral History Association, 1093 Broxton Avenue, #720, Los Angeles, CA 90024. The newsletter will continue to be printed at Baylor University, Waco, Texas.

Support the OHA Endowment Fund

The Endowment Fund of the Oral History Association provides financial support for special projects and emergency needs, assuring the promotion and maintenance of quality programs. A gift to the Endowment Fund will help the OHA meet the challenges and opportunities of the association's future growth and development. OHA invites members and other friends of oral history to support the fund.

For information, or to make contributions, contact Richard C. Smith, Executive Secretary, Oral History Association, 1093 Broxton Avenue, No. 720, Los Angeles, California 90024.

OHA Newsletter Copy Deadlines

JANUARY 1

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Videohistory: Focusing on the American Past (Part One)

(Reprinted from *The Journal of American History*, September, 1991)

BY PAMELA M. HENSON AND TERRI A. SCHORZMAN

Jack Ruttger, owner of Ruttger's Bay Lake Lodge (one of Minnesota's largest resorts) is interviewed on site for the Minnesota Historical Society's Resort Industry Oral History Project.
From the Collection of the Minnesota Historical Society

The technological revolution of the twentieth century has provided historians with new sources of documentation for their research. With the advent of video technology, the researcher has access to new types of visual information about people, places, objects and interactions. Just as the development of audio recording technology in the 1940s stimulated the field of oral history, the ease and low cost of video technology in the 1970s offered new opportunities for the historian interested in using visual documentation.

Self-conscious and structured historical documentation with video — often called videohistory — provides an essential component of research for historians interested in material culture, the use of objects and the relationships of people to one another and to their environments. Many historians have also found videohistory an excellent way to capture the history of people and communities who do not leave extensive written documentation. Visual information, then, supplements and complements documentary evidence, audiotaped oral histories, and artifacts.

The historian who uses the video medium to study a person's environment (and ways of interacting with that environment) and material culture encounters a density of information rarely found in other forms of historical documentation. The words, background, objects and movements each tell a separate story; when analyzed together, the subtle relationships between them provide an information total greater than the sum of the parts.

Individual scholars and projects nationwide have created a wide range of videohistory materials that are now available for research use. Videohistory collections contain visual portraits of scientists, politicans, doctors, teachers and artists. A video camera captured veterans discussing their Vietnam experience and a group of women scientists from Los Alamos recalling the first atomic bomb test. Videohistorians have recorded processes of traditional food preparation by southwestern native Americans, dairy farming by Minnesotans and clockmaking by New Englanders to document rapidly changing life-styles. Videohistorians have preserved glimpses of life in the city and rural towns, in the laboratory and the slate quarry, on the farm and in the factory. Videohistory collections mirror the diversity of American society and reflect contemporary historians' interest in all segments of our society.

The Field of Videohistory

The collection and use of visual information requires the historian to acquire new skills, including the ability to use and analyze visual information, to think dimensionally, to ask new questions and to evaluate new lines of evidence. But the historian who has just recently come to terms with the personal computer need not acquire specialized technical training in order to incorporate evidence from videohistory into his or her research. User-friendly video playback equipment can be operated by all but the most technologically illiterate, and professional videographers can provide expertise for those who wish to record video. Historians entering the world of video and visual information draw upon several academic traditions to guide their work, including oral history, photographic history, American material culture studies, visual enthnography and documentary filmmaking.

Experiments with videohistory in the sixties and seventies were straightforward extensions of the traditional audiotaped oral history interview. Interviewees were videotaped as the historian conducted the same interview he or she would have recorded on audiotape. A visual image of the individual captured his or her body language and natural environment. Examples of early videohistory projects include interviews with governors of Florida, historians, medical scientists and teachers. To ensure professional visual quality, however, some interviews were conducted in studio settings; they thereby sacrificed their chance to document the relationship of the person to his or her normal surroundings.[1]

Video proved an ideal medium for recording group interviews. In an audiotaped interview, it is difficult to distinguish individual voices; video, in contrast, allows the historian to identify each speaker accurately. In addition it documents facial expressions and the interactions between members of the group. In the early 1980s, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation of New York City began videotaping group interviews of important figures in American public policy and science. The presence of peers encourages discussion, with interviewees both stimulating and challenging one another's memory and accuracy. The group interview places checks on the interviewee, thus increasing the reliability of the source.

Photographs are a rich source of information about the material culture of the past, buildings gone or altered, objects no longer used, traditions no longer practiced. Oral historians soon learned that showing photographs to interviewees stimulates memories of people, buildings, and objects from earlier days. The videohistorian can take these techniques one step further by capturing not only the interviewee's discussion of a photograph, but also his or her gestures, which link names to faces or show how an object was used. In her videohistory interviews conducted at the National Zoological Park, historian Pamela M. Henson of the Smithsonian Institution Archives used photographs to stimulate discussions about changes in zoo facilities and animal care practices in recent decades. In the early eighties, James Briggs Murray, head of the audiovisual section of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library, used video to document Afro-American dance traditions. Archival film footage and still photographs illustrating changes in dance technique were used to guide the interviews of dancers and choreographers. A visual and

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Videohistory,

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kinetic topic such as dance is an ideal focus for videohistory.[2]

A very special approach to videohistory was taken at Gallaudet University, the national school for the hearing impaired. In 1977, historian John Schuchman began using video to record signed oral history interviews. He took advantage of split screen technology to simultaneously record both interviewer and interviewee. Video, thus, proved ideal for capturing visual language. Transcription of these interviews into traditional written form, however, proved a formidable obstacle.[3]

Several videohistorians have taken advantage of the ease with which video documents events as they unfold. These scholars record an event in full (not just sound bites for the evening news) and as it takes place, supplementing the primary footage with videotaped interviews. As early as 1968, Sarah Diament recorded the activities outside the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago and supplemented that footage with interviews of participants. Similarly, Charles Weiner of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology documented the controversy over genetic engineering with recordings of city council hearings and meetings, as well as interviews with scientists and community members. National Museum of American History curator Steven Lubar is currently documenting the design, manufacture and application of robotics technology through on-site recording of the design process in universities and corporations as well as interviews with engineers and students. This approach presents some dilemmas. How does the historian choose what will be historically significant? Does the presence of the historian with video camera bestow a significance on the event that the participants might not otherwise ascribe, and does this then change the event itself? In addition, practical limits to what the historian can record will always constrain this approach.[4]

Videotaping interviews troubled some oral historians who felt that the presence of cameras, lights, extra equipment and especially a video crew might intrude upon the personal, intimate nature of the interview process. The institute for Oral History at Baylor University in Waco, Texas, used a minimum of video equipment and a single technician to retain intimacy between interviewer and interviewee. Indeed, once the camera was focused on the interviewee, the technicians often left the interview site, keeping distractions to a minimum.[5]

Other programs developed a complementary approach to videotaping as a way to balance the greater cost and logistical complications of video. At the Oral History Program of the University of California at Los Angeles, extensive audiotaped interviews were supplemented with and complemented by shorter videotaped segments that focused on a visual portrait. The Minnesota Historical Society in St. Paul, Minnesota, used a combination of audio and video interviews to document farm economy, environmental issues and the resort industry. The society developed a working relationship with a local crew who were comfortable with the unscripted format of a videohistory interview.[6]

As historians became more interested in the potential of video for visual documentation, they turned to other scholarly methods of using visual evidence, such as material culture studies and visual ethnography. Scholars who study material culture focus on the role of objects in daily life (how and why they are used) rather than on the object qua object. Thus, historians interested in material culture learned from other fields and previous endeavors and adapted video to supplement traditional research techniques. Specifically, those historians interested in material culture found that video captures the daily use of objects and the relationships between objects and their users. These scholars are less interested in producing biographical profiles of individuals than in documenting the material environment of the interviewee. They want to know how specific objects were used and how people lived and worked within their environment.[7]

"The interviewer had to formulate new types of questions to elicit visual information."

Beginning with the work of Franz Boas and his students in the late nineteenth century, anthropologists interested in ritual, the use of objects and the interactions between people and objects used film to supplement notes and still photography. This tradition has served as a guide to some historians interested in documenting individuals and their material culture within their normal settings. More recently, historians have gained insights from the anthropologists' debate over reflexivity, that is, the role of the researcher in shaping his or her data. When the historian takes on the task of creating video documentation, every choice of sites, interviewee, object and question influences the resulting product. Researchers using such documentation must be sensitive to the point of view and goals of the historian who designed the videohistory project.[8]

Thus, as video became a more tested medium in historical scholarship, and as issues were addressed and analyzed, historians furthered the experiment in using video for documentary purposes. For example, in 1986 the Smithsonian Institution received a grant from the Sloan Foundation to record new types of visual information. A collection of twenty-two projects by the Smithsonian Videohistory Program on a variety of topics in the history of science and technology is available to researchers at the Smithsonian Institution Archives in Washington, D.C. Participating Smithsonian historians interviewed scientists, engineers and technicians in familiar environments or at the sites of important events in their lives. The environments alone served as powerful stimuli to the memory of the interviewees. The historians also used objects such as photographs, scrapbooks and artifacts to stimulate memory and to gain specific information about those items. Participants demonstrated how scientific research was conducted in the lab or observatory and how technical equipment was used in research and manufacturing. In this way, historians learned to maximize the potential of video to capture visual information.[9]

Smithsonian Videohistory Program projects on the Waltham Clock Company by Carlene Stephens and the Vermont Structural Slate Company by William Worthington documented factories and workplaces that operated with nineteenth-century technology. These sites were rapidly entering the twenty-first century as new owners modernized equipment. Video captured not only the daily routines of factory life, but documented where objects were placed, how equipment was used and how the many parts and people worked together to make an industrial product. Interviewees were selected from all segments of the factory community, ensuring documentation of a variety of voices and points of view.[10]

Historians soon learned, however, that it was not enough simply to hand an object to an interviewee or to go to a historic site. The interviewer had to formulate new types of questions to elicit visual information. Abstract and generalized questions were replaced with specific ones; "why" questions were replaced by "how" questions. Interviewees were asked to demonstrate or replicate the processes they usually performed with an object or piece of equipment at the site where they normally worked or lived.

For curators around the country, the opportunity to document how and by whom artifacts now housed in museums were used opened exciting new avenues of information. Advice on such museum documentation techniques is available in a pamphlet published in *History News* in 1989 entitled "Beyond the Cards: An Introduction to Documenting Historical Collections with Video Tape" by Dan Taylor and Mark Rawitsch of the Mendocino County Museum, in Willits, California. Taylor and Rawitsch used video documentation procedures while studying northern California's homesteading movement of the 1970s and 1980s. They conducted video interviews at homesteads to capture the environment and asked participants to discuss homesteading artifacts now in the museum's collection.[11]

At the Oral History Program at the University of Nevada, Reno, Tom King combined audio and video interviews to document the social and economic life of Carson Valley. Video projects focusing on ranch life, Indian cultural and spiritual traditions and the relations between Indian and Anglo culture captured environments, group interactions and artifacts. Videotaped interviews were also recorded at the site of a steam-driven sawmill to supplement modes of documentation traditional in historical

archaeology. Interviews were later combined with stills to produce a program for Nevada public television, *From Recollection and Rubble* (1984), on the use of video interviews in historic archaeology. The Oral History Program's collection of over forty hours of cataloged videotape is in the special collections department of the Getchell Library, University of Nevada, Reno.

Historians have long envied the impact of documentary films but often criticized their oversimplification and partisan interpretation of historical issues. Several recent documentary films have overcome some of those problems and can serve as models for those who wish to use the video medium to disseminate history. Ken Burns' films *Huey Long* (1987), *The Shakers: Hands to Work, Hearts to God* (1985), and *The Civil War* (1989); Richard Ellison's *Vietnam: A Television History* (1984); and Henry Hampton's history of the civil rights movement, *Eyes on the Prize* (part 1, 1986; part 2, 1990), combined archival stills and film footage with videotaped interviews. These filmmakers used interviews of scholars to supplement narration and first-person accounts to add authenticity. *Vietnam* provoked a storm of controversy over its point of view but also a good deal of serious critical thought about this traumatic episode in American history.[12]

Some documentary filmmakers have given oral history a central role in their productions. *Ten Miles to Fetch Water: A Crisis in the West Virginia Coalfield* (1989), produced by David Mould of the school of telecommunications at Ohio University and filmmaker Ann Alter, relied solely on the voices of the interviewees rather than the narration typical of documentary

"The goal of these producers is to minimize the director's point of view and give the subjects a greater role in telling their own story."

filmmaking. Media production groups, such as People's History in Texas, Inc., in Austin, have incorporated videotaped oral history interviews into their documentaries for community television. The goal of these producers is to minimize the directors' point of view and give the subjects a greater role in telling their own story. In 1972, when the Federal Communications Commission defined rules for cable access, franchise agreements required a certain level of community service. Cable TV stations have, therefore, provided technical training and facilities to community groups who were then able to reach many more people with programs about their community's past. Such programs stimulated other historians and educators to think about how they might use visual information to reach broader audiences through public programming.[13]

The University of Kentucky Oral History Program in Lexington, Kentucky, turned to videotape specifically to produce programs for public television. Oral historian Terry Birdwhistell worked with history professor George Herring and producer Britt Davis on the series *Long Road Back: Vietnam Remembered*, which aired in 1985. Over fifty hours of interviews with twenty-one Vietnam veterans were recorded to produce the one-hour program. Other viedo projects included the life of a Kentucky New Dealer. As an outgrowth of this work, the library now collects original footage and outtakes from documentaries, such as Barbara Kopple's *Harlan County, U.S.A.* (1976) and Robbie Henson's *Trouble Behind* (1990). The original tapes are available to researchers at the Oral History Collection in the Margaret I. King Library, Department of Special Collections and Archives, University of Kentucky.

END, PART ONE

FOOTNOTES FOR PART ONE:

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[2]Pamela Henson, Conservation of Endangered Species Videohistory Project, 1990 (Smithsonian Videohistory Program, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.); James Briggs Murray, "Oral History/Video Documentation at the Schomburg Center: More than Just "Talking Heads," *Film Library Quarterly*, 15 (no. 4, 1982), 23-27.

[3]Pamela Henson, "Excerpts from an Interview with John Schuchman, 1990 Recipient of Forrest C. Pogue Award," *Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region, Newsletter*, 8 (Fall 1990), 6-10.

[4]Sarah E. Diament, "Can Film Complement Oral History Interviews?" *The Fourth National Colloquium on Oral History*, ed. Gould P. Colman (New York, 1970), 122-127; Charles I. Weiner, "Oral History of Science: A Mushrooming Cloud?" *Journal of American History*, 75 (Sept. 1988), 548-59.

[5]Thomas L. Charlton, "Videotaped Oral Histories: Problems and Prospects, " *American Archivist*, 47 (Summer 1984), 22-36.

[6]Joel Gardner, "Oral History and Video in Theory and Practice," *Oral History Review*, 12 (1984), 105-11.

[7]Henry Glassie, Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States (Philadelphia, 1968); Bruce Jackson, *Fieldwork* (Urbana, 1987); Thomas J. Schlereth, *Cultural History and Material Culture: Everyday Life, Landscapes, Museums* (Ann Arbor, 1990).

[8]Paul Hockings, ed., *Principles of Visual Anthropology* (The Hague, 1976); Chris Raymond, "Increasing Use of Film by Visually Oriented Anthropologists Stir Debate over Ways Scholars Describe Other Cultures," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 27, 1991, pp. A5, A8-9; Richard Sorenson, "A Research Film Program in the Study of Changing Man," *Current Anthropology*, 8 (no. 5, 1967), 443-69.

[9]Terri A. Schorzman, "Smithsonian Videohistory Program Symposium, "*Technology and Culture*, 30 (Jan. 1989), 118-22.

[10]Carlene Stephens, Waltham Clock Company Videohistory Project, 1989 (Smithsonian Videohistory Program); William Worthington, Vermont Structural Slate Company Videohistory Project, 1989, *ibid.*

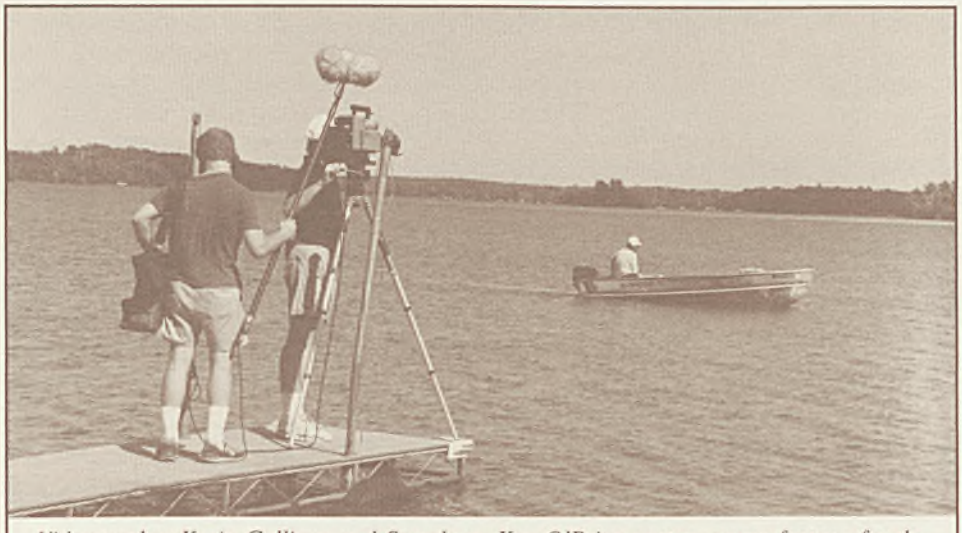
[11]Dan Taylor and Mark Rawitsch, "Beyond the Cards: An Introduction to Documenting Historical Collections with Video tape," *History News*, 44 (March/April 1989).

[12]Erik Barmouw, Documentary: *A History of Non-Fiction Film* (Oxford, 1983); Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning or Oral and Public History* (Albany, 1990), 159-78; Robert Brent Toplin, "The Filmmaker as Historian," *American Historical Review*, 93 (Dec. 1988), 1210-27.

[13]David H. Mould, "Composing Visual Images for the Oral History Interview," *International Journal of Oral History*, 7 (Nov. 1986), 198-205.

Pamela M. Henson is oral historian for The Smithsonian Institution Archives. Terri A. Schorzman is program manager for the Smithsonian Videohistory Program.

In the next OHA Newsletter — Part Two: Methodological Issues



Videographer Kevin Galligan and Soundman Ken O'Brien capture cover footage for the Minnesota Historical Society's Resort Industry Oral History Project.
From the Collection of the Minnesota Historical Society

The organization of American Historians has awarded **Don Ritchie** its Richard Leopold Prize for his book, *Press Gallery: Congress and the Washington Correspondents* (Harvard Press, 1991).

The winter 1992 issue of *The Public Historian* features the first of a new series of oral history interviews with **"pioneers of public history."** In this issue, Arnita Jones, executive secretary of the Organization of American Historians, interviews Wayne Rasmussen, who served for 25 years as chief historian of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Scheduled to appear in future installments are interviews by Holly Shulman with Forrest C. Pogue, and by Charles Hosmer with Vern Chatelain. A committee of three former presidents of the Oral History Association, Donald Ritchie, Cullom Davis, and Charles Morrissey, is advising *The Public Historian* on this oral history series.

"We seek lively, informative, even argumentative interviews," editor Otis L. Graham writes in the introduction to the series, "that offer the reflections of prominent retired or otherwise senior public historians on their careers and on the changes in public history that they witnessed, and to which they contributed." If you have any recommendations for either interviews or interviewees for the series, please contact Professor Otis L. Graham, The Public Historian, Department of History, University of California, Santa Barbara, CA 93106-9410.

Pennsylvania History will publish a special theme issue on "Oral History in Pennsylvania" in 1993. Linda Shopes, historian at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, will serve as guest editor. Proposals are currently being sought for articles and shorter pieces, including substantive articles that draw upon interview materials in imaginative ways, theoretical pieces that reflect on the nature of oral evidence, extensive excerpts from extant interviews, discussions of current oral history projects and the public presentations — exhibits, films, books, etc. — resulting from them, and other work as appropriate. Potential contributors are advised to consult the essays on oral history appearing in the *Journal of American History* since 1987.

Information about existing oral history collections relevant to Pennsylvania history is also being sought for a historiographic essay on the state of oral history in Pennsylvania.

Please direct all correspondence to:

Linda Shopes
Division of History
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
Box 1026
Harrisburg, PA 17108
(717) 772-3257

Video: The Saving Face

BY L. ELISABETH BEATTIE

"Video properly edited provides oral history a face it never had before," says James E. Fogerty, Head, Acquisitions and Curatorial Department, Minnesota Historical Society.

Fogerty added a video component to his program six years ago, and he calls his camera approach the Perlis Plan, a visual bow to "elegant simplicity."

"At the Minnesota Historical Society we conduct audio interviews first, then we select several of those narrators to retell some of their anecdotes on camera. We also taped them in environments they discuss, pointing out places or demonstrating activities. For instance, as part of our Minnesota Environmental Issues Oral History Project, we videoed Margaret Kohring, Director of the Minnesota Chapter of the Nature Conservancy, on location at Black Dog Fen."

Fogerty points out that video offers oral historians the opportunity to show physical and spacial relationships between objects and buildings at any site, and says that the Minnesota Historical Society contracts with teams that include a director, a videographer and an audio technician to film day-long interviews for approximately $1,500.

Vivian Perlis, Director of Oral History and American Music at the Yale University Library, in New Haven, CT, provided Fogerty with inspiration and a moniker for his method of selective, staged videotaping.

"The finishing touch in terms of preservation is a couple of hours of good quality video," says Perlis, whose program at Yale has incorporated video components as audio complements since 1978.

"I conducted all of the video interviews, so I know which stories told by the composers and musicians in Yale's project may be, as filmmakers say, 'more filmic.'"

Perlis supervised the first six video interviews on location, at such places as Aaron Copeland's Peekskill, N.Y. home, but says that due to their unmanageable expense of on-site taping, subsequent videos have had to be filmed in a studio Yale.

"I think video is a technology that should be used," says Perlis, "especially to secure a personality. But I also think only major figures, as opposed to all narrators, should be videoed."

Donna DeBlasio, Site Manager of the Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor in Youngstown, Ohio, says that all 54 of her center's oral histories of steel industry employees include a video component. But unlike Fogerty and Perlis, the Youngstown video method consists of taping every narrator's entire interview. The camera focuses on the seated narrator, not on the interviewer, throughout a taping.

Although Youngstown video practices and the "Perlis Plan" represent two different filming approaches and attitudes toward the purpose of visual components in oral history projects, Fogerty, Perlis and DeBlasio agree that video is vital.

"I think it's the strongest development in oral history," says Fogerty. It offers a visual element in an age that demands stimulation, and the ubiquitousness of television has made people comfortable with it. In fact, I believe video will save us."

CALL FOR PAPERS

The National Council on Public History has issued a call for papers for their annual meeting, to be held April 29-May 2, 1993, at Valley Forge, PA. Proposals are sought for complete sessions, individual papers, and panels. The subject matter should appeal to the wide range of practitioners and users of public history.

The deadline for proposals is July 1, 1992. They should include a two-page summary and a one-page vita (with current address and phone number) for each participant. Send the materials to:

Jeffrey P. Brown
Department of History
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, NM 88003

VIDEO

California Newsreel announces a new addition to its **Black America Emerges** collection. The 90-minute documentary, *Color Adjustment*, traces over forty years of race relations through the medium of prime time television. The producer, Marlon Briggs, uses program footage, civil rights news film, and interviews with producers and celebrities to analyze prejudice and perception in the Television Age. For information, contact Linda Gibson, Director of the African-American Media Project at California Newsreel (415) 621-6196.

Recording, *continued from page 1*

Yet the point is that Bard has recorded first on paper sacks and then on tape the stories of women who've slipped between society's cracks, the cracks which, in California, are now fissures.

"These women are educated," says Bard. "Most of them hold Master's or Doctoral degrees. They're articulate and they are *not* mentally ill. Lack of money has forced them to stay with friends or to live in the hills in their cars. Since they're still trying to re-enter the job market, their existence depends on their anonymity. These are the women who survive on food samples passed out in grocery stores and on complimentary hors d' oeuvres served during happy hours. They wash in public restrooms and they apply make-up with department store testers."

Bard's organization provides a variety of goods and services for the women she's interviewed, and focuses on teaching the hidden homeless survival skills and finding solutions for homelessness itself.

"These women have all the answers," says Bard, "and I'm finally getting people to realize they need to listen."

Bard refuses to exploit her interviewees, whose anonymity is their livelihood, by allowing them to appear on television talk shows or to be identified in print.

"I'm trying to establish new towns," she says, "featuring barter systems until these communities can support themselves with a cash economy. This is what the hidden homeless tell us will work," she says, "and that's the subject of my next book, *New Town America.*"

Karen Will, an alumna of Augsburg College in Minneapolis, plans to initiate an oral history project she calls Minnesota Women on Welfare. Working in conjunction with Deb Bart, Head of Augsburg's Communications Department, Will hopes to "voice a collective experience." She says, "I'm starting with the assumption that unlike their stereotype, women on welfare are intelligent, three-dimensional people. I want to record their stories, but through those tales I also hope to analyze the programs with which they're involved in order to see which ones work and which ones don't."

Will, inspired by Bart's *Shadow Women*, shares Bart's view that oral histories are not in themselves ends, but are rather means for inspiring social change.

Bob Anderson, a graduate student in American Studies at the University of New Mexico's Center for Southwest Research, agrees. A former Pittsburgh radical labor organizer, Anderson commited to recording the experiences of the steel workers, the miners and the white collar community members involved in the mill shutdowns of 1981 and 1982 and the resultant 150,000 job losses. He plans to expand his current collection of 45 interviews, all now available at the United Electrical Workers/Pittsburgh Archives of an Industrial Society at the University of Pittsburgh.

"In 1990 I located all the activists in this Movement of the Unemployed," Anderson states. "Most of my interviews centered on the Homestead, Pa. area where the mill-based economy collapsed, and I think this project is most significant for the wide range of people interviewed. I've captured the memories and attitudes of clergy representing the Denominational Mission Strategy (DMS) Movement, of Union Activists and of community members, too."

"The academicians who read *Shadow Women* prior to its publication dismissed the book because they said the hidden homeless don't exist," says Bard. "But I'd been recording these people's stories for years, and now even ivory tower dwellers must listen to the narrators who speak the truth themselves."

News

Meetings/Conferences

OHAM (Oral History Association of Minnesota) held its seventh annual conference on Saturday, April 4th at historic Landmark Center in downtown St. Paul. Co-sponsored by the Ramsey County Historical Society, the theme of the conference was ethnic and women's oral history.

"Empowerment: Perspective on African American History in Pennsylvania" is the theme of the 15th annual Conference on Black History in Pennsylvania, sponsored by the **Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.** The conference will be held at Lincoln University, the oldest historically black college in the nation, on May 8-9, 1992. The program will include a keynote address by civil rights activist Julian Bond and a number of presentations examining the diverse ways in which African Americans have asserted control over their own lives. For further information, contact Robert Weible, Chief, Box 1026, Harrisburg, PA 17108, (717) 787-3034.

The Michigan Oral History Council initiates their 1992 educational program with a workshop presented for the Novi (MI) Historical Society, Saturday, May 9, 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m. at Tollgate 4-H Conference Center, 28115 Meadowbrook Road (Twelve Mile and Meadowbrook), Novi.

Presenters include Jeff Charnley, Vice-president of MOHC and Professor of History, Michigan State University; Nancy E. Dunn, State Editor, *Detroit Free Press;* Glenn Ruggles, Teacher, Walled Lake Central High School; and Geneva Kebler Wiskmann, Secretary of MOHC.

Direct inquiries to Kathy Mutch, Novi Historical Society, P.O. Box 751, Novi, MI 48376, (513/349-6774) or the Council, 5580 West State Road, Lansing, MI 48906-9325 (517/321-1746).

Courses/Workshops/Institutes

The **Columbia University Oral History Research Office** will sponsor a two-week intensive institute in the practice of oral history this summer in New York City. The institute will be held from June 15 to June 26, 1992 and will be open to enrollment by oral historians or other social science fieldworkers who wish to explore the issues raised by the practice of oral history in various settings.

Courses will be given in oral history method, oral history theory, oral history as used in film and oral history in community history. These courses will be combined with fieldwork tours of various oral history projects in the New York area, the showing of a variety of films based upon or using oral history and a series of seminars devoted to special topics in oral history.

Faculty for the Institute will be: Ronald J. Grele, Director of the Oral History Research Office; Mary Marshall Clark, Assistant Director; And or Skotnes, Assistant professor at Russell Sage College and former Assistant Director of the office and Joel Gardner, President of Gardner Associates, a private consulting firm in oral history. Seminar leaders who will appear as part of the program will be Donald Ritchie of the United States Senate Oral History Project, Rina Benmayor, Anna Juarbe and Rosa Torruellas of the Hunter College Center for Puerto Rican Studies and Spencer Crew of the Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution. Filmmakers Lynn Goldfarb and Alan Berliner will be present to talk about uses of oral history in the marking of their award winning films "With Babies and Banners" and "Intimate Stranger," respectively. Tours will include the New York Chinatown History Museum, the Brooklyn Historical Society, Ellis Island and the New York City Transit Museum.

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Plan Ahead!!

Future OHA Annual Meetings:

1992 Cleveland, Ohio
15-18 October

1993 Birmingham, Alabama
4-7 November

1994 Albuquerque, New Mexico
27-30 October

Digging In,

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Duane DeBruyne, Public Affairs Officer for the National Endowment for the Humanities, states that NEH funding for fiscal year 1993 has in fact *increased* by 6.3 percent, but he cannot comment as to how the Endowment's $187 million budget might translate into support for oral history projects and programs.

"Oral history funding comes out of several NEH divisions," says DeBruyne, and he states records of the number of previously supported projects featuring oral history components are not available.

A spokeswomen for The National Endowment for the Arts took her comments a step further, adding, "We don't keep any such records; there's no way we could track our support of projects involving oral history."

So even though federal endowments may have recently increased, Smith's prediction that such dollars may be "difficult to obtain" appears prophetic.

James E. Fogerty, Head of the Minnesota Historical Society's Acquititions and Curatorial Department, states that on the state and local levels, he hasn't noticed much change in oral history program funding. "But I have noticed a drop in available oral history project dollars in the corporate world," he says, "and I ascribe it not directly to the recession, but to businesses reallocating funds from oral histories to funds for writing their histories or to developing new employee training programs."

Fogerty says he sees fewer companies conducting the "vanity" oral history projects popular in the 1970s and early 1980s, the projects conducted with or about retiring CEOs and presented as gifts in the form of transcribed memorabilia to the interviewed executives and their families.

"I think the falling off of "vanity" projects is directly related to the recession," he says, "but another factor has come into play with corporate oral histories. A number of companies I worked with in the 1970s and 80s have been acquired by other companies, and the original companies histories as individual units are now of no interest to their purchasers. For example, Pillsbury has been taken over by the London-based food and liquor conglomerate. Grand Metropolitan, PLC, which has meant the demise of the Pillsbury company's oral history."

Director of the University of North Texas Oral History Program, Ron Marcello, says, "Texas had *its* recession about five years ago, so given the current fiscal climate, things probably arent's as difficult here as they are elsewhere in the country."

But Marcello admits that he, too, has cut back his program's transcribers from 30 hours to 20 hours a week, has reduced his own travel budget and has foregone planned general program maintenance.

"I think the recession has affected my program in two ways," he says. "I've seen our university budget cut each year for the past three years, and this year private fundraising results declined, too, even from individuals who always donated in the past. But for the moment I'm not as concerned as I might be because we have such a backlog of tapes that we haven't needed to conduct new interviews."

Perhaps the only bright spot, economically speaking, on the oral history frontier shines from the Center of Southwest Research at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque. Carlos Vasquez, the Center's new director says, "I am trying to interview job candidates and build a program with a hiring freeze on at the university."

But Vasquez indicates that the funding the Center receives, all of it from the New Mexico legislature, is more than sufficient to initiate the six series of interviews "we have defined and are pursuing." He says, "despite the nationwide recession, I attribute our fortunate funding to the fact that there is an incredible need and a pent-up demand in this state for oral history. Twice as many people as we anticipated are attending our courses and seminars, and two county historical societies have requested our consulting services."

"Still," he adds, "our staff will have to expand, and even though the lip service is increasing, the funding will have to be fought for."

So even the easiest financial scenario reveals the need for nurturing at its roots, and oral historians nationwide are digging in to prune, pare and cut back, hoping to preserve that which is essential.

"Those who claim that oral history is extraneous are simply wrong-headed about the fact, "says Trevelan. "This recession really means that we oral historians must make our case for oral history being indispensable as a collection development tool for the historical record."

News,

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Museum, the Brooklyn Historical Society, Ellis Island and the New York City Transit Museum. The fee for registration is $600. Room and board are separate. Those interested in receiving more information or registration materials should contact:

Oral History Research Office
Box 20, Butler Library
Columbia University
New York, New York 10027
(212) 854-2273

Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, is offering a three-week intensive course in oral history July 6-24, 1992. The course will introduce students to the techniques for and the methodological and legal issues involved in collecting, arranging and publishing information from individuals for use in historical research, cultural documentation, local history projects and library/archival programs.

The course will be taught by Dr. Cullom Davis, professor of history and former director of the Oral History Office at Sangamon State University.

For further information contact Kathleen Schmeling, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan 48202, (313) 577-4024.

The Oral History Association Newsletter (ISSN:0474-3253) is published quarterly by the Oral History Association for its members and subscribers. **Copy deadlines are: January 1, April 1, July 1, and October 1.**

Address membership, change of address, subscription and delivery inquiries to: Richard Candida Smith, Executive Secretary, Oral History Association, 1093 Broxton Avenue, #720, Los Angeles, California 90024.

Address editorial matters to L. Elisabeth Beattie, Editor-in-chief, Oral History Association Newsletter, Elizabethtown Community College, 600 College Street Road, Elizabethtown, KY 42701, or phone 501/769-2371, ext. 408.

Managing Editor: Dan K. Utley, Baylor University Institute for Oral History, Box 97271, Waco, TX 76798-7271. Phone: 817/755-3437.

Oral History Association Newsletter
Baylor University, P.O. Box 97271
Waco, Texas 76798-7271

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