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## IN THIS ISSUE

President's Message

Director's Report

Volunteer Spotlight

Welcome Back Program Associate Hailey Rowe

OHA conference in Atlanta jam-packed with speakers,  
workshops, tours, inspiration

Oral History Review update

Archived oral histories help reporter cover deadly Texas floods

Opportunity available in Atlanta to record short-form stories

OHA Partner Members

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## PRESIDENT'S LETTER



By Troy Reeves

It seems like about 10 months ago—but who's counting—that I wrote my first presidential message for the OHA Newsletter. Now, I'm writing my last. But I have two more opportunities to address you all—at next month's business meeting and my welcome message inside the 2025 OHA's program; therefore, I'm going to keep this essay forward-looking and not reflective.

Steven Sielaff will address this next, but members will vote next month to possibly add History to our Standing Committees. Earlier this year, the now-concluded History Task Force proposed creating this committee, and Council discussed and approved putting it forth to you all. But I'll let Steven tell you more about it.

Traditionally, this newsletter issue serves to boost our annual meeting, and this year that's no different. So, please peruse all the pieces describing just some of the wonderful things happening in Atlanta in October at our 59th conference! Oh, and if willing and able, please attend!

Our endowment reached a milestone in early August, when it totaled more than a million dollars! While that is most certainly a significant chunk of change, our constitution and bylaws remind us that to be fiscally responsible and to continue our long-term viability, we want it to keep growing as much as possible. So, we pull just a small percentage from it each year. Those monies go primarily to our one, full-time staffer, Program Associate Hailey Rowe—and welcome back Hailey!—as well as helping Baylor's Institute for Oral History offset some of the costs involved in being our executive office. So, we will continue fundraising—with donations of any amount welcomed—to keep us moving towards an organization that, among our many long-term goals, can exist without university support—no offense Baylor ... you know I love you all!

Speaking of our constitution and bylaws, almost every year we find things that need to be added or revised, and this year is no different. So, this newsletter, as well as an e-blast or two, will point members to the PDF with the proposed changes. I ask that you review them and come to the business meeting ready to vote on them. Because it's your organization; I'm just your president ... for the next couple of months ... but who's counting? ... apparently I am!



## DIRECTORS' COLUMN



### Associate Director's Report

By Steven Sielaff

A frequent lament of mine is that while I professionally devote myself to the preservation of history, my own personal history is often left forgotten. It is only small comfort that I have noticed this trend among other historians and historical organizations. To this end, however, OHA launched the History Task Force in 2024, led by myself and past-president Amy Starecheski to investigate past collecting efforts, evaluate historical resources and champion new initiatives with an eye towards suggesting further courses of action for the association.

An obvious starting point was OHA's extant archive, which sits a mere 100 miles north of the executive office at the University of North Texas (UNT). Thanks to recent UNT system updates, we now have [an extensive finding aid](#) for our archival holdings, which the task force was able to use and evaluate as part of its work. From this came several sub-projects – creating photo identification activities for both online and conference-going audiences, as well as joint UNT-Baylor efforts to complete digitization of OHA's [programs](#) and [newsletters](#) and make them available through the OHA website. I personally feel both of these new document collections are ripe for any number of research projects on the history of our profession.

Other activities of the task force included a pilot project by Alphine Jefferson and Al Stein to determine how best to collect new material for archiving, in this case focused on the history of the Diversity Committee. The challenges they faced spoke to the support OHA will need to provide if targeted efforts like this are to be carried out in the future. Also included was the formation of an "Oral History Toolkit," which would aid members in the future with their own efforts to conduct interviews on behalf of the association.

Finally, the task force formed a Retention Policy Subcommittee where retention specialists and long-serving members alike took on the onerous task of creating a retention schedule and procedural documents outlining the official archival policies of the OHA.

All of this work culminated in a report submitted to Council earlier this year, which also included a series of suggestions for future action. Chief among these was the call to form a new History Standing Committee, which Council has already approved and is to be voted on by the membership for bylaw inclusion at the OHA business meeting Sept. 30. The committee will continue most of the work of the task force, but will also look to work with other committees and membership networks to collect and preserve the history of the association.

So be a part of history and [join us for the OHA Business Meeting](#) where we will vote to create History to further gather our history.

History!



## *Volunteer Spotlight:* **STEVE ESTES**



This month, the OHA Newsletter's volunteer spotlight turns to Steve Estes, a history professor at California's Sonoma State University. His extensive immersion in oral history includes interviews related to Southern history, civil rights, labor, gender and sexuality, military and sports, among other topics. His OHA volunteer work includes service on annual meeting program committees and several awards committees—work that involves attention to detail and plenty of patience.

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

When I was in third grade, I interviewed the wife of the mayor of my hometown (Charleston, South Carolina). I think I asked three questions. Thankfully, I did not record it. Some of my first recorded oral history interviews were conducted years later as a staff member at the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina.

### **How and when did you first get involved with the OHA?**

The first OHA meeting that I attended was held in Raleigh, North Carolina, in the 1990s. In contrast to the big, scary meetings of the Organization of American Historians and the American Historical Association, I found the OHA immediately welcoming to an apprentice historian. OHA attendees came from far more diverse professional backgrounds than other historical associations, which were dominated by (if I'm being honest) stuffy academics. (No offense to the stuffy academics out there ... since I'm now one of them.)

### **What OHA activities or governance roles have you been involved with? Why those particular ones?**

I've served on and chaired OHA awards committees and conference program committees as well as volunteering as a mentor for younger oral historians at the OHA annual conference. Serving in these ways has introduced me to new scholarship outside of my own narrow research interests. It's exciting to learn about the cutting-edge work done by younger scholars around the country and the world!

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

Reconnecting with old friends in the discipline and meeting new ones.

### **What has been most challenging about OHA volunteering?**

Living on the West Coast means that service sometimes requires a fair amount of travel. That has gotten better with remote work, but it's still the most challenging thing about volunteering.

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

Volunteering is a great way to network for publishing opportunities, funding and even jobs.

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

My favorite experience volunteering was co-chairing the annual conference that was held at Concordia University in Montreal. At that point, I'd never been to Quebec or even Canada. So despite the cost and logistics, it was such a blast to attend the conference and meet Canadian oral historians. In other words, volunteering for the OHA made me a far less provincial person.

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## **Welcome back Program Associate Hailey Rowe**

Hailey Rowe has rejoined the Oral History Association executive office as program associate. She first took on that role in January of 2024 and said she was thrilled to be able to return to the position in August of 2025.

Rowe holds a master's degree in information science and bachelor's degree in middle grades education. In addition to teaching middle schoolers English and math, she also has worked as a museum educator and libraries serials assistant.

Rowe said she loves connecting with oral historians and supporting behind-the-scenes work for OHA.

OHA Executive Director Stephen Sloan welcomed Rowe's return and said: "The Executive Office and OHA Council want to thank Leslie An for her many contributions to the work of the association during her time as program associate."

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## **OHA conference in Atlanta jam-packed with speakers, workshops, tours, inspiration**

By Autumn Brown, Oklahoma State University  
Conference Co-Chair

We are thrilled to welcome you to the 2025 Annual Conference of the Oral History Association in Atlanta from Oct. 15-18 at the Crowne Plaza Atlanta-Midtown hotel.



As we move toward the 250th anniversary of the United States, our conference theme, “Exploring Our American Stories: Oral History and American Identity Approaching 250 Years of Independence,” invites us to reflect on the multifaceted narratives that define who we are, who we have been and who we hope to become. This year’s conference offers a vibrant and thoughtful program designed to challenge, inspire, and connect oral historians, educators, archivists, students and community leaders from across the country.

Enhance your conference experience with various tours throughout Atlanta. Tours will include the Mid-Century Women of Midtown Walking Tour (\$20). The 20th century brought change to Atlanta and to the lives of the women who lived and worked there. On a Midtown walk, this tour will consider how the area transformed from rural homes to an urban center.

You can also choose a special themed tour of Atlanta’s historic Fox Theater, a former movie palace turned performing arts venue located at 660 Peachtree St. in Midtown. This tour will take you through time to Ancient Egypt and the Middle East while learning about the history of the Shriner Organization and movie mogul William Fox. See why the city of Atlanta cried out to “Save the Fox!” from the wrecking ball in the 1970s and fall in love with the theater under a canopy of stars. On this hour-long tour, at a rate of \$25, you’ll learn not only about the theater’s stunning architecture but also about all its ghosts as well.

Cliff Kuhn’s Atlanta by Bike tour (\$50) is open to cyclists of all abilities and will explore different areas of Atlanta, including the Sweet Auburn Neighborhood. This leisurely ride will include stops with opportunities to visit the Madame CJ Walker and WERD Museum and to purchase some lunch or snacks at Your Vitamin Lady. The tour is in memory of Cliff Kuhn, OHA past president, past executive director and avid cyclist who loved Atlanta.

We are proud to present two timely and thought-provoking plenary sessions that address the urgent questions of our time:

1. “What does this Moment Require?: The Relationship of Oral History to Organizing” featuring Dartricia Rollins, Ashby Combahee, Daniel Horowitz and Lynn Lewis. This plenary is an invitation and challenge to oral history practitioners to consider oral history as an organizing tool to challenge authoritarianism. Dominant narratives demand forgetting; and the story of struggle, particularly of marginalized people, is the first to be memory holed. Panelists will discuss and pose questions about the role of oral history in building collective power. (Sponsored by OHMA)
2. “The Harvest: Integrating Mississippi’s Schools” featuring Charles Bolton, who will moderate a discussion between filmmaker Doug Blackmon and civil rights attorney Jaribu Hill. Following a screening of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Douglas Blackmon’s documentary, “The Harvest: Integrating Mississippi’s Schools,” this plenary session will take a look at the history of America’s education system and its ongoing implications for the nation. (Sponsored by Georgia Humanities)

This year’s keynote address will be delivered by Bettina Love, who holds the esteemed William F. Russell Professorship at Teachers College, Columbia University, and is the acclaimed author of *Punished for Dreaming: How School Reform Harms Black Children and How We Heal*, a New York Times bestseller. Titled, “Love, Joy, Creativity & The Brain: The Heart of Culturally Responsive Education,” Love will explore the transformative power of love in education—both inside the classroom and beyond. Her insights into culturally responsive pedagogy, joy and the neuroscience of learning will challenge us to consider how oral history can serve as a tool for healing, empowerment and collective liberation.

Lastly, we are happy to announce our pre-conference workshops beginning on Wednesday, Oct. 15. These workshops will include **Students Sharing Authority: Oral History in the Classroom**, co-led by Jen Cramer and Jennifer Baumgartner. This half-day workshop builds upon a previous mini workshop presented at the 2024 OHA conference. This longer format will provide hands-on opportunities to guide attendees through the process of incorporating oral history pedagogy into university coursework.

Also available is **Mic, Memory and Method: Essentials for Your Oral History Project**, designed for newcomers but open to all. This workshop will explore key aspects of the oral history process—from project design and equipment selection to effective interviewing techniques, legal and ethical considerations and managing an oral history project. Participants will also learn about post-interview workflows such as transcription, archiving and sharing oral histories with wider audiences.

**Applying Neuro-Affirming Practices in Oral History** is another pre-conference workshop this year. The Autistic Voices Oral History Project (tAVOHP) records, preserves and shares the lived experiences of autistic individuals, centering voices historically excluded from dominant narratives—such as Black, Brown and Indigenous autistic people; non-speaking and minimally speaking individuals; trans and non-binary people; autistic women; and autistic elders. This project documents these perspectives and advances oral history methodologies by integrating cross-neurotype communication strategies and neuro-affirming practices that address the double empathy problem and challenge traditional assumptions about communication, processing and storytelling.

The fourth workshop is **All About Audio Recording**. Significant innovations in digital audio recording have occurred in the past few years, and several new microphones and recorders are now available. This workshop offers a general introduction to current and next-generation microphones and portable audio recording options for practicing oral historians.

Also, join us in Atlanta for Learning from People's Stories, a workshop for educators on Saturday, Oct. 18 from 8:30 a.m. – 3 p.m., (with add-on events Friday night for Georgia teachers interested in potential PLUs credit hours.) The event will be hosted by Local Learning & Teaching with Primary Sources and partners with staff from American Folklife Center, Vermont Folklife, Oklahoma Oral History Research Program and New York Folklore. The cost for teachers and educational staff, including paraprofessionals, is \$25, and is free for registered attendees of the Oral History Association or American Folklore Society meetings. Please note, even if you are registered for either OHA or AFS, we suggest you register for this workshop because seats are limited.

Register and learn more here: <https://locallearningnetwork.org/teaching-with-folk-sources/>.

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## Are you ready to be a part of OHA 2025?

Register here: <https://oha.memberclicks.net/registration-oha-annual-meeting-2025#/>

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# OHA members eligible for group rate at Crowne Plaza Atlanta-Midtown

OHA members can take advantage of a group rate of \$152 per night if they make a room reservation by Sept. 14 at the Crowne Plaza Atlanta-Midtown.

To book online, use [this link](#), select the correct dates (i.e. within October 15-18) and number of guests.

To book by phone, call 404-877-9000 and ask to speak with a reservation agent to book your stay dates with the group code, "OHA."

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## And while you're clicking on links...

Register now to attend the virtual annual business meeting, scheduled for Sept. 30, from 2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. CDT. <https://zoom.us/meeting/register/bzJJ2G6wRQK5N9RfjIprIQ#/registration>

Long-time OHA members will recall that the annual business meetings typically were early morning, sparsely attended events scheduled during the fall conferences. OHA leaders last year broke with that tradition and scheduled a successful, well-attended annual business meeting via Zoom. Repeating that success, this year's business meeting will include a financial update, information on plans in progress and other important OHA developments.

Also on the meeting agenda are proposed constitution and bylaws changes, which you can review here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oFY9laUzWUbsz3GyVckHSdhXj3lilfwh/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oFY9laUzWUbsz3GyVckHSdhXj3lilfwh/view?usp=drive_link)

The proposed changes largely are stylistic and grammatical. One substantive change is a proposal, described earlier in this Newsletter, to add a History Committee to the list of OHA standing committees. Members can examine the complete text at the above link.

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## *Oral History Review* update

**By Holly Werner-Thomas**  
**Editor**

The upcoming fall issue of the *Oral History Review* is already mostly online and will be in print and in your mailboxes soon.

Kicking off the fall issue, oral historians Nicki Pombier and Liza Zapol ask the question, "Where's the joy?" of oral historians everywhere whose average approach—albeit with good cause—is to focus on trauma, in "Serious Play—Teaching to Play in Oral History."



In this issue, we are also fortunate to feature two articles whose authors are primarily linguists and whose training has given them insights into the use and structure of language, authors who use archives in innovative ways to bring forth original findings, authors who focus on post-conflict studies, and still more who interrogate intergenerational issues.

One, “You Folks Are the Ones That Are Going to Carry On”: Conducting Cross-Generational Oral Histories About the HIV/AIDS Crisis,” concerns the AIDS crisis in its first two decades, while the other, from Cypress, analyzes family history. The current issue also includes articles on Argentina and “The Afterlives of the Tenth Panchen Lama in China’s Tibet,” as well as community-based projects from Kansas and Colorado.

Of note, we have four media reviews in this issue, including two that highlight music, an oral history of Pitchfork, and Yale’s Oral History of American Music (OHAM) archive. Among our book reviews this fall is *The Come Up: An Oral History of the Rise of Hip-Hop* from author Jonathan Abrams.

As ever, there is always in search of book and media reviewers. These are oral history practitioners who love to read, and those who seek to visit museums, listen intently to podcasts, watch documentaries or see what’s happening on the Web. They must also enjoy writing and want to contribute to the oral history community in a meaningful way.

For book review enquiries, please contact Book Review Editor Jacey Anderson, @ [ohrbookrevieweditor@gmail.com](mailto:ohrbookrevieweditor@gmail.com). For media review enquiries, please contact Media Review Editor Bud Kliment, @ [OHRMedia@outlook.com](mailto:OHRMedia@outlook.com).

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## Archived oral histories help reporter cover deadly Texas floods

When ProPublica Newsletter reporter Logan Jaffe set out to find historical context for her reporting about the deadly Guadalupe River flooding this summer in Central Texas Hill Country, she unearthed a treasure trove at the University of North Texas Libraries.

“Often when I try to understand a place or process a big news event, I look for records kept by local historical societies and libraries,” she wrote in a July 12 Newsletter. What she found in a collection titled [Rescuing Texas History, 2014](#) included oral history interviews provided by the [Kerr County Historical Commission](#) to [The Portal to Texas History](#), a digital repository hosted by the [UNT Libraries](#).

There, an interview conducted nearly a quarter-century ago with the now deceased W. Thornton Secor Jr. offered eyewitness descriptions and family memories from a long-time Kerr County resident of devastating floods that have long plagued the region. The oral histories call into question claims by local officials this summer that the severity of the July flood was completely unexpected.

"The oral histories show Kerr County residents have warned each other, as well as newcomers and out-of-towners, about flooding for a long time," Jaffe reported.

She cited Secor's recollection in his oral history of a time in 1959 when his father tried to warn a newcomer about building a house too close to the river. The woman scoffed that earlier high-water marks of previous flooding could never happen again. A flood swept away her new home, and her body later was found in a tree, Secor recalled.

You can find Jaffe's ProPublica piece here: <https://www.propublica.org/article/texas-floods-oral-histories>

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## Opportunity available in Atlanta to record short-form stories

OurStoryBridge Inc. founder Jery Huntley will be available at the Atlanta OHA conference to record 3- to 5-minute stories of people's current experiences related to contemporary issues like the economy, immigration, health care, community resilience and freedom and justice. The short-form recordings are intended to "capture digital history in the moment before the stories are lost," Huntley said in a press release.

Anyone interested in recording a short story can email her at [listen@ourstorybridge.org](mailto:listen@ourstorybridge.org) to schedule a recording session, "especially if you have lost a federal grant or fellowship or have been impacted in other ways," she said.

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### 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](mailto:ohaeditor@gmail.com).

### Interested in Advertising with the OHA?

Advertising space is available in 2025 OHA News Blasts and Newsletters. Reach out to [oha@oralhistory.org](mailto:oha@oralhistory.org) for more information.

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