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# PRESIDENT'S LETTER



## By Sarah Milligan

The Oral History Association leadership is gearing up for a year of assessment and new objective setting as we extend our current strategic plan for another 3 years (2027- 2029). In many ways during our current moment of increasing geopolitical uncertainty, and governmental oppression, both intellectual and physical, will both drive our assessment of who we are as a professional organization and what it means to serve our membership in times of precarity. We are seeing the imperative nature of our work to document witness to lived experiences and multiple perspectives as events are rewritten in real time on a daily basis. As a field, oral historians

have grappled with the ethics of balancing safety and necessity of securing recorded narratives to help detangle politicized control of a historical narrative. We have a place in this moment. Through our modest grant supporting work in areas of emerging crisis, to our diverse and energetic membership, we can make visible the ethics and care of developing and safeguarding pockets of evidence of the action and the toll this moment is taking.

We are not the only professional field who is wrestling with how to be present at this moment, and we will continue to seek points of solidarity and collaboration with our aligned organizations. As we are watching our colleagues at National Parks sites directed to uninstall physical interpretive evidence of slavery and other historical truths that don't fall in line with a Presidential directive to remove material that promote "corrosive ideology" and an executive order to the NPS to not "inappropriately disparage Americans," we can join efforts to speak out against this historical erasure, while also supporting efforts to ensure erasure isn't permanent.

Through this backdrop of constant breaking news, we are also continuing with the day- to-day, like most of you. We are planning an annual meeting in Portland, Oregon in October. Committees are dreaming up ideas for virtual 2026 programming, and organizational leadership is planning for future stability and financial growth. We all just move forward a little bit at a time and setting goals for who we need and want to be is critical as we vision our future in those steps. For our membership, please reach out with thoughts and ideas. We are always happy to dream about possibilities. And as an amazing colleague of mine recently reminded me, "enjoy the ordinary stuff – It'll help you get through all the rest."



# DIRECTORS' COLUMN



## By Steven Sielaff, Associate Director

### But What about OUR History?



I've often joked that historians can be some of the worst professionals when it comes to documenting their own history. I can understand the environment that produces this outcome as many of us are more interested in capturing and promoting other voices that might not exist outside our efforts. But from time to time, it is important to take a step back and re-focus our skills and energy on our own colleagues and networks that make this work possible.

It was under these auspices that the OHA History Task Force was formed. Throughout 2024 and into 2025 the task force, chaired by then-Past President Amy Starcheski, worked on several fronts to investigate ways to better collect and highlight the history of the OHA. Three major outcomes were produced and adopted by OHA Council in the fall of 2025.

The first was the formation of a new standing committee: the History Committee. The inaugural charge of the committee is to “collect, preserve, interpret, and activate OHA’s formal & informal history.” The committee is slated to achieve this through engagement with Council, oral history practitioners, potential archival donors, and the OHA’s archives at the University of North Texas (UNT). The committee will be officially launched soon but will feature many members of the task force to continue their initial work. Included in this mix was an exploration of the OHA archive, creation of methodologies for labelling individuals in photographs, and a test case on how to gather materials associated with a particular OHA entity focused on the Diversity Committee.

The second was the development of a toolkit of documents for anyone interested in conducting oral histories of OHA members moving forward. These include sample data forms, release forms, and FAQs to enable not just the committee to do this work but other OHA members or entities. This too will be launched later this year, and the History Committee will guide these efforts moving forward. As for the processing of these interviews, Baylor’s University’s Institute for Oral History has agreed to provide transcription and processing services, and the final products will be co-deposited at Baylor and the OHA archive at UNT.

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Speaking of the archive, the third major development was a project I found myself at the center of: the creation of an official suite of records retention policy and procedural documents to adjudicate future transfers of official OHA records to UNT. These documents as well as a link to the finding aid for our archival collection now live on the [OHA website](#), and the records retention schedule will begin in earnest in 2026. The Executive Office will spearhead this effort, but leadership positions throughout the association will play a crucial role moving forward in documenting and securing these historical documents.

Many thanks to the members of the History Task Force for all their hard work in this, and a personal thank you to the records retention subcommittee for sticking with me for much longer than initially imagined! With their efforts and Council's support, OHA is well positioned to collect and preserve the important work and history of the association.

The OHA History Task Force roster included: Amy Starecheski (chair), Steven Sielaff (ex officio), Alphine Jefferson, Lauren Kata, Kae Bara Kratcha, Carlos Lopez, Todd Moye, Kathy Nasstrom, Anne Ritchie, Don Ritchie, and Holly Werner-Thomas.

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## VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT NATALIE FOUSEKIS



This newsletter, we are highlighting Natalie Fousekis for her volunteer work on behalf of the Oral History Association with the American Council to Learned Societies.

Natalie first became an oral historian in graduate school. She wanted to write a history of grassroots action for child care first in North Carolina and then in California. The only way to tell that story was to record the stories of the women who participated in these movements. Her favorite project was the Women, Politics, and Activism Oral History Project at California State - Fullerton.

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Natalie has been not only an oral historian, but active member of OHA. She first got involved as a volunteer for OHA as a member of the program committee in 2004. Since then she has served as a program co-chair for the 2014 annual meeting in Madison, Vice President of OHA in 2018, and President of OHA in 2019. This year, Natalie is taking on OHA's delegation to ACLS where she will act as a trusted voice on behalf of the oral history field in order to advise their strategic mission. Please join us in wishing Natalie the best in her new volunteer role this year.

*OHA News continued on the next page.*

# OHA NEWS UPDATES



This year's annual meeting will be held in Portland, Oregon from October 14 - 17. Proposal Submissions are due on February 20. Click the image above for more information.

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## Trauma-Informed Interviewing, Reckoning & Beyond: A Virtual Symposium

June 23-25, 2026

The Oral History Association will host a virtual three-day symposium on trauma-informed interviewing, reckoning, and beyond, June 23, 24 and 25, 2026. The first day of the symposium will focus on trauma informed interview methodology, including project design, community engagement, and interview techniques. The second day will explore reckoning with ethical issues around oral history projects centered on trauma, including resiliency, healing and accountability. The final day will highlight questions about what happens after the interviews are completed, including strategies for what comes next, impact on communities, narrators, and interviewers, and using public history to engage a wide audience.

Key questions that will be addressed include: How do we work reciprocally with communities? How do we navigate insider/outsider dynamics? How soon is too soon to do a project? How do we avoid reducing people to their traumas and treating their stories as monoliths? How can we respect the cultural specificities of how traumas manifest in different communities? What are our responsibilities to narrators versus their narratives? How do we mobilize these stories for policy change and other forms of justice? Symposium co-chairs, Shanna Farrell, Anna Sheftel, and Francine D. Spang-Willis, along with symposium committee members, will invite a curated selection of presenters to speak about their oral history work as it relates to these three overarching topics.

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# HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS CELEBRATE AMERICA 250 WITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Sophomore students of Maumee High School in Maumee, Ohio completed their first oral history project. The project, composed of 28 interviews, details the local history of the town as part of Maumee's America 250 celebration. The students then turned these interviews, along with other archival quotes, into a 40-minute script. The presentation can be viewed on [YouTube](#).

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## CLOSURE OF AUDIO TRANSCRIPTION CENTER OPENS NEW OPPORTUNITIES

After 60 years in business, the Audio Transcription Center dissolved and permanently closed the company on 12/24/25. Although this news came as a shock to Michael Sesling, the 20-year Vice President of ATC, he says he's got some exciting news. "I decided it was in the best interests of the clients and transcriptionists of ATC alike to start my own firm, and work to build something new and fresh from the ground up," Sesling said. "I decided this was an opportunity to implement the initiatives that I feel are the most critical to oral historians and academics alike moving forward, and this was the moment to develop partnerships for long term success. I am already working on client projects offering an all-human team of transcriptionists for those projects that require more than AI alone is able to offer. I've added AI transcription in a partnership with TheirStory, where I now offer raw AI produced transcripts, indexes, and more as produced by TheirStory's state of the art Oral History-centric technology platform. Additionally, I offer human authentication of AI produced transcripts, project management, captioning, indexing, copy editing, proofreading, and more. I've got a team of humans who have a rich knowledge of a veritable cornucopia of subjects, and who are trained in these specific areas of business." Sesling confirms the business is already active and processing a multitude of work for clients that range from all of the aforementioned services. Sesling may be reached at [Michael.Sesling@gmail.com](mailto:Michael.Sesling@gmail.com) or (617) 943-9480 if you have any questions.

# ORAL HISTORY REVIEW UPDATES



By Holly Werner-Thomas, Editor

We are very excited about all that we have upcoming in the *Oral History Review*. The fall issue will be dedicated to Indigenous Oral History with Sara Sinclair as Guest Editor and with articles on everything from the legacies of boarding schools and slavery to archives and treaties. Overall, Journal readers may look forward to, in Sara's words, ethical and relational frameworks that "center Indigenous epistemologies rather than translating them solely for Western academic validation." Our fall issue also coincides with the OHA conference in Portland, Oregon, and the call for paper that in part focuses on Indigenous oral history. We look forward to seeing you there.

Meanwhile, articles for our spring issue will begin to appear online in February (the print version is due out in April), and it is hard to overstate what an abundance of ideas it holds. We have a special section, with three articles, on oral history and AI that are sure to spark discussion; a survey article from Amy Starecheski on the history and evolution of oral history and anthropology that considers what each field can learn from the other; an applied oral history article from Lynn Lewis on participatory action research and her work with Picture the Homeless in New York City; Eleanor Paynter writes on displacement and Ukrainian reception in Italy, an article that grew out of her OHA Emerging Crisis Grant Award; plus an article on the use of gatekeepers in oral history projects (in the author's case, in West Belfast, Northern Ireland); and finally one on political memory in China that reimagines deaf histories.

Among our book reviews this spring is our second "Classics Revisited" feature (on *Please Kill Me! The Uncensored Oral History of Punk*); media reviews include the podcast (Studs Terkel's) *Division Street Revisited: Unfinished Stories from the 1960s* and the film *Becoming Thurgood: America's Social Architect* from The Legal Defense Fund (LDF) Oral History Project.

The *Review* is always looking for reviewers. Please contact our Book Review Editor, Jacey Anderson, at [ohrbookrevieweditor@gmail.com](mailto:ohrbookrevieweditor@gmail.com), and our Media Review Editor, Bud Kliment, at [OHRMedia@outlook.com](mailto:OHRMedia@outlook.com).



## EDITOR'S NOTE



It's my honor to introduce myself as the new Newsletter Editor on behalf of the Oral History Association. I first made the decision to become a historian because of my coursework in oral history during my undergraduate studies and while oral history has been a background component of my work in the field, I'm delighted to have this full circle moment where it is at the forefront of my work again. In addition to my new responsibilities with OHA, I am the Media & Marketing Associate for the [Monuments Toolkit](#) at World Heritage USA.

I look forward to becoming better acquainted with our network of oral historians, including meeting so many of you in person at the annual meeting this fall. Please do not hesitate to contact me for inclusion of items in forthcoming newsletters.

~ Noah Price

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What would you like to see in the next OHA Newsletter? OHA Newsletters are sent out four times per year. Have a suggestion for content for the newsletter? Email Noah Price at [noah@worldheritageusa.org](mailto:noah@worldheritageusa.org)

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