



NEWSLETTER
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Winter 1982

OHMAR

ORAL HISTORY in the MID-ATLANTIC REGION

OHMAR Workshop in Maryland **ORAL HISTORY and the ARTS** **APRIL 16-18, 1982**

Musicians, actors, dramatists, painters, dancers, and others connected with the arts have all become the subjects of oral history, and will be the central focus of this year's oral history workshop. "Oral History and the Arts" is the title of the meeting which will be held on the weekend of April 16-18, at the Center for Adult Education on the College Park campus of the University of Maryland.

Individual researchers on the program will include David Seaman, Lawrence Warren, and Jean Tucker speaking respectively about oral history projects in graphic arts, dance, and silent film. Presentations on behalf of institutions will include Garnett McCoy of the National Museum of American Art, Lorraine Brown of the Institute of the Federal Theatre Project and New Deal Culture (George Mason University), Gerladine O'Tremba of the John F. Kennedy Center Oral History Program, and Ron Welburn of the Institute for Jazz Studies (Rutgers University).

Friday evening the program will open with a festival of films based on interview projects in the arts. Saturday sessions will include conference sessions on oral history programs in the arts, held concurrently with workshop sessions in basic interviewing, processing, and project management. Oral History Association President John Neuenschwander will be the special guest speaker at the Saturday luncheon. On Saturday evening, Vivian Perlis of the Charles Ives Oral History Project (Yale), will discuss and show the film "A Good Dissonance Like a Man," based on the Ives project. On Sunday morning, moderators from all the Saturday sessions will address the question: "What are the issues of producing and using oral history in the 1980s?"

Registration will be \$10 for OHMAR members, \$12 for non-members, and \$8 for students. Reservations for the Saturday luncheon are in addition, as are other meals.

The Center for Adult Education is located off Campus Drive near the intersection of University Boulevard and Adelphi Road, inside the Washington, D.C. Beltway. A limited number of hotel accommodations is available at the Center. Make reservations with the Center for Adult Education, c/o Sue Little, University of Maryland, College Park 20742 (Tel.: 301-454-2325). Prices are \$32.50 for singles, \$40 for doubles, and \$51 for triples (plus tax). Nearby motels include the Quality Inn, Maryland Inn-Best Western, Holiday Inn, and Royal Pines-Best Western. Inquiries regarding the workshop and space for displaying project materials should be sent to OHMAR, Box 266, College Park, MD. 20740, or by phone to Bruce Wilson at 301-454-5611.



NEWSLETTER
vol. 4, no. 1, 1980

ORAL HISTORY in the MID-ATLANTIC REGION

OHMAR HONORS FORREST POGUE AT ITS FALL MEETING

Former OHA president Forrest C. Pogue was recognized for his distinguished contributions to oral history with the presentation of a certificate of merit at the fall meeting of OHMAR on 3 November 1979. OHMAR also announced that future awards, to recipients chosen annually for significant work in oral history in the mid-Atlantic states and the District of Columbia, will be known as the "Forrest C. Pogue Award."

In his address, Dr. Pogue recalled that he engaged in oral history during his duty in World War II as a combat historian. He conducted his first interview aboard an LST as it approached the Normandy invasion beach using a spiral notebook as his "tape recorder". With the interview as a basic method of approach, he tried to get to the veterans of a particular action within 3-5 days after combat. Dr. Pogue stayed as close as possible to the Regimental Headquarters and prepared himself for the interviews by thoroughly researching all the papers about a single campaign (i.e., plans, orders, communications and after-action reports). This knowledge was invaluable in helping to sort out the truth, ask the correct questions and, as he put it "sense whether the interviewee was a phoney".

The meeting, held at the Natural History Museum of the Smithsonian Institution, also focused on the diverse oral history projects currently underway within the many branches of the Smithsonian. Along with Dr. Pogue, the speakers included Louise Hutchinson of the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum, Richard Hallion of the National Air and Space Museum, and Susan Kalcik of the Smithsonian's Folklife Program. Each of the latter described their program.

The Anacostia Neighborhood Museum is the Smithsonian's community museum located in the southeastern part of the District. As part of its commitment to community involvement and local history, the Research Center of the Museum has conducted an extensive research project on Anacostia history. This project culminated in the exhibit, "The Anacostia Story: 1608-1930," which opened in March of 1977, and in the publication of The Evolution of A Community and The Anacostia Story: 1608-1930 (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1977); and in the formation of the Anacostia Historical Society. Oral history interviews of residents as old as 102 years were an integral part of the program. The approximately 100 tapes, covering the period from the 1980s to the 1940s, have been checked for accuracy through the use of manuscript collections. They are available to scholars subject to restriction of the interviewees. The National Air and Space Museum has collected oral history since 1968. Interviews are conducted by curators as part of their research projects in aviation and aerospace history. Many, but not all, of the tapes are transcribed.

The Family Folklore Program of the Office of American and Folklife Studies developed from the Festival of American Folklife held annually on the Mall by the Smithsonian. Family stories were collected from approximately 2000 festival participants from 1974 to 1977. These tapes are indexed and will be available for

BOOK REVIEW

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie. Montaillou, The Promised Land of Error. New York: Vintage Books, 1979. 383 pp. \$4.95

ORAL HISTORY IN THE MIDDLE AGES?

Oral historians who associate their craft exclusively with twentieth century research will be surprised to find a similar methodology supporting Emmanuel Ladurie's account of a small town in the Pyrenees during the early fourteenth century.

Even more remarkable, Ladurie's subjects are not the feudal lords and high clergy of traditional histories of the Middle Ages, but the common folk: shepherds, shopkeepers, peasant women, village priests and heretics. His study penetrates the basic cell of medieval society, the "domus," a term meaning both family and house. And he achieves this by citing the direct testimony of the peasants themselves.

Ladurie's source is the Inquisition Register of Bishop Jacques Fournier (who later became Pope Benedict XII at Avignon). A zealous and compulsive interrogator, Fournier was determined to stamp out the Cathar heresy in his diocese. His inquisition court at Parmiers operated for 370 days between 1318 and 1325, and completed 578 interrogations (418 accused and 160 witnesses). Rather than rely on torture, Fournier used persistent questioning to root out heretics, methodically searching through the details of their daily lives for contradictions and corroborations in the testimony.

Each interview went through three stages: first a scribe hastily would take notes during the interrogation; then a minute from the notes was drafted and submitted to the accused, who could make alterations on it; finally several scribes would copy the corrected version on to parchments which for several centuries have been stored in the Vatican Library.

As a result of that massive effort, Ladurie is able to quote the actual words of the ordinary people of Montaillou as they described their domus, work styles, religion, superstitions, and sexual practices. (Accounts of the latter, particularly of the libidinous village priest, made the book a bestseller in France.) The oral testimony is laced through the book, printed in italics and followed by page references to

a published edition of the complete transcripts. It is a simple and effective means of presentation.

This volume will fascinate oral historians, no matter what their field--or century--of study.

Donald A. Ritchie

CHANGE IN CONSTITUTION NEEDED

During 1979, OHMAR made application to the Internal Revenue Service for tax exempt status. In their letter commenting on our application, the IRS District Office in Baltimore informed OHMAR that additional information was needed and that a change in the OHMAR constitution would be required before further processing of the application. The OHMAR Executive Board can supply the information (i.e., a brief history, back issues of the NEWSLETTER, financial statements and details of workshop arrangements) however, the constitutional change requires participation of the membership. The current constitution does not meet the organizational test of section 1.501(C)(3)-1(b) of the Income Tax Regulations since the OHMAR objectives in Article II are not sufficiently limited to those allowable under section 501(C)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. In addition, the dissolution provision in Article XI does not provide for the possibility that the Oral History Association may not be exempt at the time of OHMAR's dissolution or may be unwilling or unable to accept OHMAR's assets. To correct these deficiencies, the OHMAR Executive Board will propose at the Spring meeting the following two additions to the Constitution for discussion and vote:

a) add to Article II as a new Section 3: "OHMAR is organized and shall be operated exclusively for educational and charitable purposes within the meaning of section 501(C)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954."

b) add to Article XI as a new Section 2: "However, if the Oral History Association is at the time of OHMAR's dissolution, no longer in existence, no longer a qualified distributee, or unwilling or unable to accept the assets of OHMAR, then such assets will be distributed exclusively for the charitable purposes of OHMAR to an organization or organizations which are qualified as exempt organizations under section 501(C)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code of 1954 (or the corresponding provision of any future United States Internal Revenue Law)."

COMING EVENTS (continued)

will be discussed. A box lunch is included in the Saturday registration fee; dinner at ethnic restaurants in New Brunswick will be available at an extra cost. The Friday evening session will feature "New Jersey Public Television Folklore Films" and the Sunday morning workshop will be on the "Folklore of the Deaf". (Additional registration fees required for these sessions.) If travelling by car, take Exit 9 off the New Jersey Turnpike and go west on Rte 18 to the George St. ramp. Bear right on to George St. and cross over Rte 18. Proceed to the Douglass College Campus. Hickman Hall (Friday night session) is the tall building on the far right side of the intersection at the first traffic light. The Student Center (Saturday and Sunday morning sessions) is the brick building on the near left side of the intersection at the second traffic light. Over night accommodations are available at the Sheraton Motor Inn, 195 Highway 18, East Brunswick, N. J. 08816, telephone 201-828-6900.

***The Fairfax County History Commission is sponsoring an all-day oral history workshop in Fairfax in April 1980. The program will emphasize community oral history. OHMAR member Mary Jo Deering is the coordinator. For further information, please contact Sara Collins, 5414 8th Road South, Arlington, Va., 22204; telephone (703)671-7189.

OHMAR TREASURER'S REPORT

Another IRS mandate is for OHMAR to restate its financial history in terms of a uniform fiscal year instead of the calendar year used previously. November 1st has been chosen as the start of the fiscal year as it is closest to the previous pattern of reporting and would enable the treasurer to report on a completed fiscal year at each fall meeting. Accordingly, Bruce Wilson reports that on 31 October 1979 the balance in the OHMAR account was \$761.11 and the balance in the Workshop account was \$1,089.14. Total OHMAR funds in the National Capitol Bank (Wash., D.C.) checking account were \$1,856.25.

SWLA/NEH ORAL HISTORY PLANNING GRANT

The Southwestern Library Association/National Endowment for the Humanities Planning Grant is gathering information on oral history collections in their region's libraries. If you have information on an existing or planned oral history collection which qualifies, please send to: Kathleen Hill, SWLA Suite 321, 11300 N. Central Expressway, Dallas, Texas 75243.

TIDEWATER ORAL HISTORY PROJECTS

OHMAR member Terry L. Jones reports that he has organized an oral history program at Portsmouth campus of Tidewater Community College concentrating on various aspects of Portsmouth's history since 1941. In addition, there are two other on-going oral history projects in Norfolk and Portsmouth, Virginia. Old Dominion University (Norfolk) has a limited program involving interviewing retired professors and school personnel. Norfolk State University has a program directed by OHMAR member Tommy Bogger that concentrates on interviewing people in the black community.

DON'T FORGET THE EDITOR

The editor needs the help of the readers for newsworthy items for the next issue. Please try to limit each article to 150 words. The deadline for submission for the next issue is 18 April 1980. We hope to mail the NEWSLETTER by 9 May 1980. Please send to:

ARTHUR J. ZOEBELEIN
P.O. BOX 1113
FRONT ROYAL, VA. 22630

ITV SERIES ON U.S. ETHNIC HERITAGE

OHMAR members Diane Gayeski and Edward Jurewicz have written an article in December 1979 issue of Audiovisual Instruction concerning a series of ITV programs, entitled "Mosaic: America's Ethnic Heritage", recently produced by the University of Maryland Educational Technology Center. The project, supported by a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, portrays the historical, social

ESSEX MEETING FEATURES AUDIO-VISUAL USE OF ORAL HISTORY

OHMAR members gathered at Essex Community College near Baltimore on November 7, 1981 for their fall meeting. In addition to the presentation of the Forrest Pogue award, and an afternoon panel discussion on the use of oral history in audio-visual productions, participants were also able to enjoy the Maryland Ethnic Heritage Festival held on the campus the same day.

During the morning session, Ben Frank received the third annual Forrest C. Pogue award for outstanding and continuing contributions to oral history. Since 1966 he has been conducting oral histories for the U.S. Marine Corps, on subjects ranging from the Spanish-American war to the Marine Corps hostages in Iran. In his acceptance speech, Ben described the development of the oral history collection at the Marine Corps Museum, from the days of reel-to-reel to cassettes and word processors. "Oral history has been a way of life for me for the last sixteen years," he concluded. "Oral history is a gasser."

Pam Henson then opened the business meeting and discussed the past year's activities. She announced that future Pogue award presentations would be made at a separate dinner, and that Sara Collins is making arrangements for the 1982 dinner. She also announced that OHMAR had at last received its bulk mailing permit, which will reduce costs and allow for expansion of the newsletter. Pam commended Bob Maddox for his chairing of the spring workshop in Canaan Valley, West Virginia, and Don Ritchie for his work as OHA colloquium chairperson in Burlington, Vermont. After the various officers filed their reports, the members elected new officers for 1981-1982. They are:

President: Bruce Wilson
Vice President: Patricia Cooper
Treasurer: David Goodman
Secretary: Theodora Poletis
Member-at-large: Amelia Fry
Nominating Committee: Alice Hoffman,
Ben Frank, Fern Ingersoll, Robert
Maddox, and Barbara Vandegrift

Martha Ross then reported on a serious budget crisis that has befallen the Regional

Oral History Office (ROHO) at the University of California at Berkeley. After a discussion, the following resolution won unanimous approval and was forwarded to the head of the Bancroft Libraries, the President of the University, and the Governor of California:

WHEREAS the Regional Oral History Office at the University of California is universally recognized as a pioneer in the practice of oral history collection and preservation; and WHEREAS it has assembled a major research collection in California political history, women's history, conservation history, and other fields, and serves as a model for other oral history collections; and

WHEREAS Willa Baum and her associates have, through affiliations, publications, and lectures made significant and unique contributions to the professionalization of oral history methodology;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that OHMAR express support for the Regional Oral History Office, for Willa Baum and her colleagues, and for their continuing role of leadership among oral history professionals.

The afternoon panel discussion provided a remarkably wide range of examples of the use of oral history in audio-visual public presentations. Chairing the panel was Lyn Goldfarb of the Service Employees' International Union, and co-producer of the film "With Babies and Banners." Linda Zeidman of Essex Community College showed her slide-tape production on the Sparrows Point steel mills, done in cooperation with the steel union and narrated by a worker at the mill. She has also received an NEH grant to turn the slide show into a film. Barry Lanman and several of his students from the gifted and talented program at Millford Mill High School, showed their slide-tape presentation on the 1910 Baltimore Air Show.

In the area of film, Marie Lehnert of the Media Foundation for an Improved Culture showed a dramatization of oral history interviews about World War I; while Al Spoler of Maryland Public Television showed a segment of "The Great American Road Show," based on "Baltimore Voices," which will be shown on national public television this spring. Questions from the audience raised several issues about how dramatization changes the nature of oral history interviews.

BURLINGTON WORKSHOP AND COLLOQUIUM PRESENT
NEW VIEWS ON ORAL HISTORY

THE WORKSHOP

Those who arrived in Burlington, Vermont in time for the workshop on Thursday and Friday, Sept. 24-25, 1981, were amply rewarded for their efforts. A two-track system provided a series of useful meetings for both novices and experienced oral historians. The "A" series took the participant carefully through the questions of beginning a project, selecting equipment, conducting interviews and processing the resulting tapes. The "B" series offered a chance to discuss the issues involved in new technology, in project organization, in setting up a clearinghouse, and in developing regional organizations.

Jerry Handfield, the Workshop Chairperson, presented a strong argument for high quality, distraction-free recording. He cited interviews conducted with Robert Penn Warren, which, unfortunately, contained a good deal of background noise. Given the interviewee, the material was intrinsically interesting. Yet while a transcriber with headphones could convert the sounds to paper, those in the audience had to strain to understand a fraction of what Warren said. If only the interviewer had anticipated the possibility of other uses of audio material!

Among those most heavily attended sessions was that offered by Terry Streiter of Murray State University. He discussed the place of oral history in developing family history. It was a carefully thought out paper, offering insights into the concerns of family historians to the oral historians and giving novices at oral history some ideas as to how their new equipment might be used. For example, we were urged to keep in mind just how intrusive the tape recorder can be and the possible divisiveness of individual interviews, in contrast to group sessions.

By accident, the session on new technology in oral history proved how widespread the use of word processors has become. When the scheduled speaker failed to appear, three members of the audience were drafted to explain the systems their projects used. Each described a different process, from MAG cards to on-line editing, all of which have significantly speeded up transcribing.

Richard Voekel
Strayer College

THE COLLOQUIUM

Two hundred and forty-two people attended the OHA's 16th annual colloquium in Burlington last Sept. 25-27. Once again, speakers demonstrated the growing variety of uses of oral history in dealing with such subjects as black culture, business and labor, politics, the military, environmental controversies, and even tourism and recreation.

Although there was no central theme to the colloquium, and underlying interest that wove through many of the sessions was the public presentation of oral history through film, radio broadcast, slide-tape shows, library exhibits, and publications. Howard Green chaired a panel discussion on the uses and misuses of oral history in community action. The Southwest Library Association presented a session on their year-long effort to use oral history in local history collections, both to acquire new material and then to exhibit it to the community--and candidly admitted their various levels of success and failure. On Friday evening several visual productions were shown: the films "The Last Stand Farmer," and "Bridges to History," and a slide-tape show on Connecticut's maritime traditions. Perhaps the best attended session was that on publication of oral history. OHMAR members Joan Morrison and Charlotte Fox Zabusky described the processes of publishing their book, The Immigrant Experience, and Lawrence Suid briefed the audience on his copyright suit against Newsweek, the only court test so far of oral history copyright under the new law.

The Burlington colloquium was fortunate to hear several dynamic featured speakers. Anthropologist John Langston Gwaltney both entertained the audience with selections from his tapes from Drylongso, but challenged them to have the courage to ask "embarrassing questions." Herbert Parmet gave a rousing after-dinner address on his search to find the real John F. Kennedy through written and oral sources. And at the first "past presidents' luncheon," Forrest Pogue gave a clear view of the origins of oral history and the Oral History Association in the United States.

As program chairperson, I especially want to thank all the OHMAR members who helped to make this a successful colloquium.

Don Ritchie
Senate Historical Office

THE AHA LOOKS AT ORAL HISTORY

Unlike last year's meeting in Washington, where oral history was missing entirely from the program, the American Historical Association meeting in Los Angeles this past December featured three sessions on oral history.

August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, two prominent scholars of Afro-American history, discussed preliminary findings of their historiography of their field. The study asked why scholars entered Afro-American history, who and what influenced their thinking, and what cross-fertilization existed among people working on similar subjects. They concluded that seminal studies, generally imagined to have shaped whole schools of thought, were often overlooked by young researchers, who read them only after completing their own work.

Meier and Rudwick conducted most of their interviews over the telephone and rarely recorded any of the conversations. Instead they took notes, and in a few cases sent copies of the notes to the interviewees for correction and changes. They generally promised that the interviews would be off-the-record and not for attribution. Only this way, they felt, would people speak candidly about their colleagues. They have no current plans for depositing their notes in a library after their book has been published.

Where Meier and Rudwick used oral history for their own research, seeking answers to specific questions, Sherma Gluck took an opposite approach. In a session on "The Use of Oral History in Women's History," she spoke on women workers in the Los Angeles aircraft industry during World War II. Gluck based her paper on 43 life history interviews. As commentator Ron Grele of UCLA pointed out, these life histories allowed Gluck to locate her subjects in time--seeing how they were shaped by earlier experiences and how the war affected their later lives. This gave the paper a larger perspective and helped her avoid some of the over-simplifications of previous studies on women war workers. Oral history also enabled Gluck to explore areas where no other sources were available: how war work changed women's self-esteem, competence, and family relationships.

In a workshop session on videotaping oral history, Rosemary Levenson talked of oral history as a "creative art," and showed her videotape interviews with California conservationist Lester Roundtree. Steve Fisher then described the uses of oral history in public television documentaries, and showed samples of his projects. Fisher conceded that it was better to tape record an interview first and return later to video-tape the interviewee, as a means of avoiding "talking head" shots, and of obtaining pictures of the subject in a variety of settings.

One of the highlights of the AHA convention was indirectly connected to oral history. Members were treated to a private showing of the commercial film Reds, which employs on-camera interviews with a number of "witnesses" who knew John Reed and Louise Bryant. Their testimony gave the movie a historical setting, helped change the scenes, and added a sense of authenticity to an admittedly controversial subject. The only complaint about the device was that the witnesses were not identified during the film.



ORAL HISTORY OF WPA ARTS PROJECTS

The Institute on the Federal Theatre Project and New Deal Culture at George Mason University is proposing to undertake an oral history program of interviews with former participants in WPA Arts Projects--Art, Music, Writers, and Theatre. In order to avoid duplication, the Institute is seeking information on interviews and oral history projects which have already been completed. Suggestions for interviews which should be done would also be appreciated.

The oral history project will supplement George Mason's existing collection which includes about 250 interviews with former participants in the Federal Theatre Project (FTP) as well as the "product" material (plays, posters, photos, research materials) of the FTP. Please contact Roy Rosenzweig, Director of Oral History Program, Institute on the Federal Theatre Project and New Deal Culture, 5th Floor, Fenwick Library, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030; (703)323-2546.

STATE OF THE ART

Edited by Mary Jo Deering

/I have excerpted the following article from The History Workshop Journal, #12 (Autumn 1981), pp. 96-107./

THE PECULIARITIES OF ORAL HISTORY

by Alessandro Portelli

Oral sources are oral sources. The disregard of the orality of oral sources has a direct bearing on interpretive theory. We hardly need repeat here that writing reduces language to segmentary traits only--letters, syllables, words, phrases. But language is also composed of another set of traits, which cannot be reduced within a single segment, but are also bearers of meaning. For instance, it has been shown that tonal range, volume range, and rhyme of popular speech carry many class connotations which are not reproducible in writing.

Oral sources are narrative sources. Therefore the analysis of oral history materials must avail itself of some of the general categories developed in the theory of literature. For example, some narratives contain substantial shifts in the 'velocity' of narration: that is substantial variations in the ratio between the duration of the events described and the duration of the narration. An informant may recount in a few words events which lasted a long time, or may dwell at length on brief episodes. These oscillations are significant, although we cannot establish a general norm of interpretation. In all cases there is a relationship between the velocity of the narrative and the meaning the narrator has in mind.

/T/he unique and precious element which oral sources force upon the historian and which no other sources possess in equal measure (unless it be literary ones) is the speaker's subjectivity. They tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what we now think they did. Oral sources may not add much to what we know of, for instance, the material cost of a given strike to the workers involved; but they tell us a good deal about its psychological

costs. The organization of the narrative (subject to rules which are mostly the result of collective elaboration) reveals a great deal of the speakers' relationship to their own history. The credibility of oral sources is a different credibility. /T/he importance of oral testimony may often lie not in its adherence to facts but rather in its divergence from the facts, where imagination, symbolism, desire break in.

/T/oday's narrator is not the same person as took part in the distant events which he or she is now relating. Nor is age the only difference. There may have been changes in personal subjective consciousness as well as in social standing and economic condition, which may induce modifications, affecting at least the judgment of events and the 'coloring' of the story. However, informants are usually quite capable of reconstructing their past attitudes even when they no longer coincide with present ones. If the interview is conducted skillfully and its purposes are clear to the informant, it is not impossible for him or her to make a distinction between present self and past self, and to objectify the past self as other than the present one, other than now. In these cases, irony is the major narrative technique used: two different ethical (or political) and narrative standards interfere and overlap, and their tension shapes the narrative.

/T/he inherent non-objectivity of oral sources lies in specific intrinsic characteristics, the most important being that they are artificial, variable, partial. Oral testimony is only a potential resource until the researcher calls it into existence. The content of the oral source depends largely on what the interviewer puts into it in terms of questions, stimuli, dialogue, personal relationship of mutual trust or detachment. It is impossible to exhaust the entire historical memory of a single informant. Oral historical research therefore always has the unfinished nature of a work in progress. But the unfinishedness, the partiality of oral sources infects all other sources. Given that no research can

(continued)

Book Reviews

Catalogues of oral history collections are increasingly being published, as Betty Mason's review below suggests. Though these catalogues are not without their problems surely they are a sign of the maturation of our work. They will do much, it seems to me, to facilitate greater use of extant oral histories by researchers. In addition to the Maryland Historical Society catalogue reviewed by Mrs. Mason, we have received notice of a recently published catalogue of the holdings of the University of Vermont/Howe Library in Burlington. Additional catalogues of oral history materials are noted in the Fall, 1981 OHA Newsletter.

We have also received notice of the publication of My Voice Was Heard, a project of the National Council of Jewish Women, Pittsburgh section, edited by Ida Cohen Selavan. This book (a sequel to By Myself I'm a Book) pieces together segments of dozens of interviews conducted by the NCJW to form a narrative/memoir of the contributions of Jewish women and men to the Pittsburgh community. It is available from the NCJW at 1620 Murray Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15217 (\$15.00 cloth-bound and \$9.95 paperback).

The current issue of Radical History Review (no. 25), "Presenting the Past: History and the Public," may be of interest to oral historians, many of whom are involved in public presentations of historical materials. RHR's stance is self-consciously critical; it raises questions about the political and ideological implications of much current work in public history. Two OHMAR members have articles in this issue. Howard Green of the New Jersey Historical Commission has written an incisive "Critique of the Professional History Movement," and I have an article analyzing my work with the Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project, "Oral History and Community Involvement."

"How Vanzetti Said Goodby" (Journal of American History, 68, Sept. 1981), also poses interesting questions for oral historians. Questioning the authenticity of Bartolomeo Vanzetti's famous statement beginning "If it had not been for these things. . .," author Fred Somkin then engages in a piece of historical detective work to determine its true origin. While his results are inconclusive, the questions he raises about distorting oral evidence, and the rigor with which he analyzes the text of the interview are relevant to oral historians.

One final note. The relative infrequency of the OHMAR Newsletter's publication and

space limitations on book reviews necessitate that only a few books get reviewed in each issue, often many months after their publication. Consequently, many excellent books using oral history sources go unnoted. One book that we had to omit was Dean Rusk by Warren Cohen (Totowa, NJ: Cooper Square, 1980), which draws upon extant oral materials in its treatment of Rusk's positions in the Department of State and Rockefeller Foundation. I would appreciate hearing about books people think should be noted in this column, even though it may not be possible to review them. My usual plea goes out for individuals interested in reviewing specific books.



Linda Shopes
Book Review Editor
3103 Abell Avenue
Baltimore, MD 21218

Guide to the Research Collections of the Maryland Historical Society: Historical and Genealogical Manuscripts and Oral History Interviews, edited by Richard J. Cox and Larry E. Sullivan. Baltimore, MD: Maryland Historical Society, 1981. 354 pp. \$22.00 00.

It is always a red letter day when the catalogue of an oral history collection reaches this desk, and the new guide from the Maryland Historical Society which brings the 1968 edition up-to-date is especially welcome, since oral history marks a new respectability by joining historical manuscripts and genealogical manuscript collections in this soberly elegant navy blue and gold bound volume.

Turning immediately to the oral history portion compiled by Betty McKeever Key, several good points catch the eye at once: the list of oral history interviewees at the beginning of the section, and indispensable tool for the researcher; the inclusion of individual interviewers' names; the use of interviewer-donor (OH 8227-OH 8249) and self-interview (OH 8216) categories; the frank acknowledgment of poor sound where it exists (OH 8048, OH 8122); and the careful record of the other speakers present at the interview (OH 8038, as an example). All of these are not only very useful but give the user confidence in the collection. The index, which covers the sections on historical and genealogical manuscripts as well, is enormously valuable to the oral history researcher, since

First-Person America, by Ann Banks, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980. 320 pp. \$13.95.

During the late 1930s, the Federal Writers' Project (FWP), part of the Works Progress Administration, collected over 10,000 interviews with working people--the "hard-working poor." Many were to be used in a series of anthologies. When New Deal programs began grinding to a halt not long after, due to conservative opposition and U.S. entrance into World War II, nearly all of the volumes were left unpublished and the vast store of narratives lay largely unused. Ann Banks has culled through the Library of Congress' enormous collection of interviews and has selected 80 for publication in First-Person America.

Banks' introduction outlines the nature and scope of the FWP and notes how many young talents got valuable experience while working as federal writers. Ralph Ellison, Saul Bellow, and Studs Turkel are but a few. She has organized the interviews into eleven topical sections. In some cases, these correspond with specific projects the FWP originally planned to publish in separate volumes, such as those on meatpacking in Chicago, tobacco culture in North Carolina, and immigrant granite workers in Vermont. Others she grouped according to her own themes, such as "Women at Work." All sections begin with an introduction and each interview has a short explanatory headnote. She has included a number of photographs, and while it takes a moment to realize that few actually show the respondents themselves, they are excellent complements to the text.

Many of the interviews are wonderful. They document aspects of people's lives and work in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but they offer vivid portraits of people in the '30s speaking of their struggles to survive in the midst of a national Depression. Some of the latter descriptions are hauntingly familiar in today's climate of cutbacks and unemployment, while others, such as those with former vaudeville performers or patent medicine peddlers, recall aspects of our culture which have all but vanished.

Banks has chosen a diverse group and happily we find men and women, blacks and whites in these pages. Subjects range from the world of white jazz artists in Chicago to life on the frontier, but most relate in some way to the issue of work. Some of the best are in the section on Vermont granite cutters.

In one, a cutter described an intricate marble statue he had carved for a grave of a young girl, and Banks included a picture of the monument on the next page--a nice touch. Also effective are interviews with three widows.

Critics charge that the FWP interviews are flawed because the interviewers varied so much in their abilities (not all were writers by craft) and relied on notes taken during, or jotted down after, an interview. These are reasons for using the interviews with care. However, the material is too rich to be tossed aside because of such problems. Too, Banks has sought to reduce their impact on her book. She chose many interviews which were originally intended to be published together and were conducted by one person or a small team of interviewers, and she also located and questioned 11 of the 41 federal writers cited in the book. She also talked with a few of those who had been interviewed by the FWP. These additions reveal some, although not all, of the limits of the interviews and also help us to view the federal writers themselves as workers who, as Banks points out, were frequently no better off than the people they interviewed.

I do wish we had even more information on these interviewers and their thoughts on the FWP. Perhaps Banks could have included their interviews in the volume rather than only using quotes from them to introduce the FWP narratives. We also need to know more about her methods of selection. She explains that she searched for a "quality of immediacy" but this is not enough. The issue of her criteria for selection is especially important given that she did not do these interviews herself. Thus we have two layers of intervention--the original interviewers and Banks, a user. I wonder too if we are perhaps ready to move beyond collecting interviews and letting people "speak for themselves." In this regard I found myself eager for more analysis of the various themes emerging from the narratives.

This engaging book is quite timely--not only because the interviews depict people in the midst of hard times, but because we have come to debate, once again, whether the federal government should take an active role in supporting the arts and humanities. From my view, First-Person America, with its many interviewer/writers and its rich source of information about a time now past provides strong evidence for an answer in the affirmative.

Patricia Cooper
Smithsonian Institution

CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS

The Alexandria Archaeological Research Center is preparing a city survey of Alexandria, Virginia, funded by the NEH. The project includes archaeology and architectural history, but will also incorporate oral history. They plan to interview long-time residents of Old Town and its suburbs about the city's economic past and its geographic details. The project is looking for volunteer interviewers and will conduct workshops and produce a manual to help train them. If you are interested, please contact either Pam Cressey or Claudine Weatherford at (703) 838-4980.

NEW JERSEY GOVERNORS' PANEL

On April 28, the New Jersey Historical Commission will celebrate the publication of New Jersey Governors, 1664-1972: Biographical Essays by Michael Birkner and Paul Stellhorn (NJHC, 1982), with a panel discussion on oral history interviews with four former New Jersey Governors: Robert Meyner, William Cahill, Richard Hughes, and Brendan Byrne. Questioning the governors will be Professor Richard P. McCormack of Rutgers University and John Cunningham, a popular writer of New Jersey History. The meeting will take place in Trenton. For further information, contact the New Jersey Historical Commission at (609) 292-6062.

ORAL HISTORY IN NORTHERN VIRGINIA

Roy Rosenzweig would like to hear from people who have undertaken, are currently undertaking, or are interested in undertaking individual or group oral history projects on any aspect of the history of Northern Virginia. You can reach him at the History Department, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA 22030 (703) 323-3035 (or 2546).

WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

Have you completed an oral history project? Begun a new series of interviews? Received a grant or an award? Changed jobs? Had some new thoughts about oral history? The editor will gratefully accept items (of any length) for inclusion in the Newsletter. The next deadline is May 8, 1982. Please send to P.O. Box 266, College Park, Md. 20740.

NEWSLETTER TO ACCEPT ADVERTISEMENTS

The OHMAR board has voted to accept advertisements in future issues of the newsletter. In addition to defraying the cost of publication, the board believes that appropriate advertisements relating to oral history equipment, transcribing and interviewing services, and positions sought, will be of service to all oral historians in the mid-Atlantic region. The IRS has confirmed that professionally-oriented advertisements will not jeopardize OHMAR's non-profit status.

The Publications Committee has set initial rates of \$10 for classified ads of 25 words or less (\$25 for three consecutive issues).

For display ads the rates are: 1/8 page --\$15; 1/4 page--\$25; 1/2 page--\$40; full page--\$75. Those advertisers purchasing half or full page ads will also receive a copy of the membership directory.

Those interested in placing ads in the newsletter should send their material to P.O. Box 266, College Park, MD 20740.

ORAL HISTORY CLASSES

Are you teaching a class on oral history in the 1982-83 academic year? OHMAR would like to list all upcoming oral history classes in the mid-Atlantic region in the next issue of the Newsletter. Please notify the editor of the institution, its location, the semester classes will be offered, days of the week, hours, name of the instructor, and any other relevant information. One-day and other short-term classes will also be listed.

EQUIPMENT EDITOR

Are you mechanically inclined, technologically curious, and a discriminating consumer? Then OHMAR would welcome your participation. We are seeking an Equipment Editor for the Newsletter to write or to solicit articles on a regular basis about tape recorders, tapes, microphones, transcribers, word processors, and other oral history equipment. Call Don Ritchie at (202) 224-6900 or (home) (202) 526-5303.