

FOR THE RECORD

Oral History in the Mid Atlantic Region (OHMAR) Newsletter
www.ohmar.org

Summer/Fall 2003

Oral History Association Holds Annual Conference in Maryland This Fall

The Oral History Association invites all OHMAR members to attend the OHA Annual Meeting at the Bethesda Hyatt Regency Hotel from October 8 to 12, 2003. The conference program has lived up to the call for "presenters to take up the challenge of how oral history can illuminate the ways people weave the cultural mosaic of our society by creating communities in diverse settings and locales."

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The conference begins on Wednesday, October 8 with a variety of workshops that will appeal to those new to the field as well as to experienced practitioners. Full day opportunities include a workshop for beginners and another for those interested in using oral history for radio documentaries. Half-day sessions focus on oral history in the digital age, and oral history and the law.

Conference sessions begin officially on Thursday, October 9. In addition to papers sessions, there will be an all-day "Community Showcase" room that will highlight many local grassroots groups who use oral history within their communities. Thursday's keynote speaker, Barbara Franco, is the executive director of the City Museum of Washington, D.C. Ms. Franco will explain how the City Museum's new home will be a site to educate the public on the many neighborhoods that comprise America's capital. Conference attendees will then have a first-hand

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Letter from New OHMAR President Roger Horowitz

I am very honored to have been elected OHMAR President at the spring 2003 meeting. Since joining the OHMAR board in 1996, I have been deeply impressed with OHMAR's commitment to grassroots oral history and the tremendous level of activity by OHMAR members in the oral history field. Oral History is expanding in many directions and our members are active in a wide variety of organizations, from state agencies and museums, to libraries, archives, and independent

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OHA Fall Conference Continued . . .

opportunity to appreciate the museum's efforts at the evening's Presidential Reception held at the City Museum,

The community theme persists throughout the conference in presentation that consider ethnic and racial groups in other places and counties that have preseed, and sometimes transformed, their sense of community despite migrating to new homes. A Friday plenary session will highlight how the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History uses oral history throughout its varied exhibitions, followed by keynote speaker Victor Casaus Sanchez, one of Cuba's leading oral historians. Tours Saturday morning and afternoon will provide behind-the-scenes views of the Library of Con-

gress, historic Mount Vernon, and the "U" Street neighborhood, a historically African American neighborhood and revitalized arts district. On Sunday morning attend a plenary panel with leading oral historians who will address the new legal challenges facing oral history research offices.

OHMAR has played a major role organizing the 2003 OHA annual meeting, and we hope that OHMAR members will participate and enjoy the sessions, workshops and tours. Program and registration information will be sent to OHMAR members in the mail, or you may go choose to get the information directly via the web at www.dickinson.edu/oha. ♦

--Submitted by Roger Horowitz

2003 Lyman Award Presented to Roy Rosenzweig

Congratulations to Roy Rosenzweig, director of the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University, for receiving the prestigious Richard W. Lyman Award, presented by the National Humanities Center. The Lyman award recognizes those who have advanced humanistic scholarship and teaching through the innovative use of information technology. He was cited for "his use of information technology to expand and diversify the audience for works of

history; to incorporate new voices, especially the voices of ordinary people, into works of history; and to make the practice of history more open and collaborative." The George Mason Center for History and New Media offers a rich collection of digital archives, guides for researchers of American history, on-line magazines, and free digital tools for historians. The Center can be accessed via the web at <http://chnm.gmu.edu>. ♦

--Submitted by Don Ritchie

Free Software for Historians

Exploring and Collecting History Online (ECHO) announces a new suite of free, user-friendly software suitable for historians interested in developing interactive websites. George Mason University's Center for History and New Media sponsors ECHO, a project dedicated to Internet-based collection and preservation of the history of science and technology. ECHO is funded by a grant from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

ECHO Managing Director Dan Cohen developed the software to address the needs of public and social historians interested in incorporating new media into their work. The three

applications--"Web Scrapbook," "Survey Builder," and "Poll Builder"--allow users to easily and efficiently organize Internet-based history projects and to develop online surveys and polls. Following are the three applications:

- "Survey Builder"--This software allows historians with no knowledge of "html" to easily create, edit, and manage online surveys and survey responses. Users may create both complex and simple web-based surveys. The application allows users to post survey responses on a separate webpage.

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Forrest C. Pogue Award Interview--Pete Daniel

Each fall OHMAR honors a distinguished oral historian with our Forrest C. Pogue Award for outstanding service to the field. This year, the award will be presented to Pete Daniel, a curator at the Smithsonian's National Museum of

American History, and a scholar of the American South. Following are excerpts from an interview with Don Ritchie on January 30, 2003.

DR: What made you become a historian?

PD: Well, to cut directly to the chase, what made me a historian was taking a course taught by David Smiley on Civil War and Reconstruction. It was about my sophomore year in college, at Wake Forest. I don't think I had ever realized before how much layering, how much fun, how much controversy was involved in history.

I grew up in a world of absolutes. Absolutely, segregation had been settled. Absolutely, Christianity had been settled. All of these things had been settled. So I thought that when you read a book it was the truth. And then you get in undergraduate school as a history student and David Smiley was basically arguing with that in every way. It was like the Damascus moment. Your eyes are opened.

So I think that's where I got the interest to really become a historian, because I saw another level of history that I had never seen before. The history I had taken up to then was very much a chronological history, and a great person history, and a white history, the usual thing for the mid-'50s that you grew up with.

But when I reflect back . . . there were so many things that growing up in a little, small town, shaped my ideas about class, and race, and work. [From the workers at his father's saw mill] I learned about work, the poetry of work, and then the brute strength of work . . . Working-class people are much more complex, often skilled, and fascinating than what I was being taught in school. These lessons at the time were not apparent. But when I distance myself from it and look back on it, I can see how much I learned from these men, and how much I saw that, because I didn't know anything about oral history and I didn't have a movie camera or any of that, was lost.

The biggest loss was from a man named

Neil Evans, who worked for my father in the woods. He didn't cut the trees, he snaked them, and snaking--for people who don't understand this terminology--is you basically pull the logs from where they fall and are cut into the length you want, up to where a log cart can take them and haul them out of the woods. Neil did this driving two horses. He drove these horses with his words and with his voice. He had a thundering base voice. He was a little man, about five foot six, a black man, solidly built, and talked to the horses in a language that he and the horses understood. It was a singing, chanting, musical type sound that still resonates in my mind, and this has been a long time ago. I just wish that somebody had known to film this or to record it. Or talk to Neil about where he learned it.

These kinds of things, in my mind, I think I learned about class and work. Of course, race was inherent, because I worked with black people and delivered papers to black people, and quickly learned that a lot of the black people I knew were smarter than a lot of the white people I knew, and in a lot of cases were more fun. So when I was told about segregation--and of course in 1954 I was just in high school--it didn't make any sense.

DR: How did you manage to take those life experiences and weave them into the professional history that you were doing?

PD: It wasn't until I got to [the University of] Maryland and was doing my dissertation where a lot of that came to bear. Of course, I was fortunate the second year that I was there to go work for Louis Harlan on the Booker T. Washington Papers, so the race thing was very much present in that. I learned a lot of history that I didn't have a clue ever existed, like I think any person who studied history in those days. It was before very many people knew very much about African

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church yard. I rode by and I thought: they look old enough to remember. So I turned around and went back. And three of them did. We stood there in the church yard, and I said, "Where were you during the flood?" One of them pointed across the field and he said, "You see over there? That's where the levee broke." And then he told this vivid story, and so did two others, just standing out in the church yard. See, this was unfiltered by preparation or by being the spokesperson for a community. It was just spontaneous, and it was rich. So I learned a lot about memory, the way the people who were the community spokes- people recalled, and then the way when you happened upon somebody like Mrs. Campbell or these three men out in the church yard remembered things.

DR: People shared their scrapbooks of pictures of things like cars sitting on front porches.

PD: Yeah, that particular picture of the car sitting on a porch-I'm just remembering the woman's name, Myrtle Staples-she just had those. She took them as a kid. She was a teenager and she was out in the flood. So when I interviewed her, she made those available to me. So did a man along that same river road out in Arkansas. Everybody told me this guy C.D. Dupree was just a real bad person. He owned a bar in Watson, Arkansas. Of course, that only whetted my appetite to talk to him! As you would too, Don. So I ended up there talking to him, and he was just charming. I went into his bar and I introduced myself, chatted a little bit. I said, "I understand you have a lot of photographs." He said, "Yeah, I do," and he pulled them out from under the counter. He had a nice big scrapbook of pictures. We went over to a booth, there was no business in the early afternoon. I had my camera and as we went through there I said, "I'd like to copy them." He let me copy his pictures, and as I copied, he was telling me what they were. It triggered his memory. He knew who the people were. He remembered a lot of incidents that happened in Watson. It was just delightful.

I don't know why people tell these stories

about people. In Greenville, I was down at the levee commission office interviewing a bunch of people and they were sort of the official things, and somebody said: You really need to talk to this other guy, Herman Caillouet, who did a lot of rescuing. I had heard people say, "He's pretty eccentric." It was an incredibly good interview. A lot of times I think you have to realize that people that you're told not to talk to sometimes have a much more interesting slant than the official people.

DR: Between the interviews, and pictures, and writing style, your books stand apart. Now you have moved into a three-dimension presentation of objects. How did you get into the museum world?

PD:The museum thing started in 1980 when I was working for Senator Robert Morgan, who was defeated in that election in 1980 and I was basically unemployed. [Having left a tenured position at the University of Tennessee to join the Senator's staff.] I got invited over to a party at [the National Museum of] American History. It was while I was there that I saw Gary Kulik, who I knew, and he said, "We're doing this exhibit on Franklin Roosevelt's 100th birthday and we need somebody who knows documentary photography." Since I had done a lot of work on that, I got hired for the summer of '81. Then I was fortunate to have a fellowship at the [Woodrow] Wilson Center for a year. When that was coming to an end, it just turned out that Terry Sharrer [an agricultural curator at the Museum of American History] was going away for a year on leave, and since I had been there working on the Roosevelt exhibit, they hired me to replace him for the year, since I knew something about agriculture. And then when Terry came back, they just kept me. So there was no clever planning to end up at the Smithsonian, it was just total luck, like a lot of things that have happened to me.

So ending up in the museum world was a total accident, but what I found out when I got there was that a historical background like I had

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Pogue Interview Continued . . .

was the perfect preparation. I think as much as anybody there, I see how you can combine research, collecting, and exhibits.

DR: You worked on the Rock 'n' Soul Museum in Memphis, can you tell me a little about that, particularly in terms of using interviews?

PD: That project we had hoped would open at the Museum of American History and travel. We never raised any money to do it at the museum, but the people in Memphis raised money. So we did it totally there, for them. It was a Smithsonian-conceived and executed exhibit done for Memphis, the Rock 'n' Soul Museum....

You sit there and you talk to someone like Sam Phillips or Billy Lee Riley, or Carl Perkins, or any number of other people we talked to, and I had to learn some interviewing techniques for myself. Because Lee told me that in any interview that you are going to use possibly for reproduction: you never cover the person talking's voice; you always allow them to finish their sentence before you say anything; you never say "Uh-huh," as you well know; you never do grunts and groans and laughs or any other noise. You're absolutely quiet.

But how do you get somebody to quit talking? At first, I couldn't say anything. I felt totally restricted on this. Because some people would really go on and on. They had great stories but they could go so far and you had to get them to stop. So I finally found out that the way you get somebody to quit talking when they're going on with a story is you start with sign language: a raised hand, a quizzical look, an open mouth like you want to talk, finally you can intimidate them into shutting up-without saying a word, it's all with sign language....

So I learned a lot about interviewing, and I have to say I feel honored beyond almost anything that I got to talk to these people. These musicians and stock car drivers were so inspiring that it was just a magic time. I feel fortunate that I got to do that.

DR: And the videos are being shown in the museum? What was the intention for them?

PD: The intention was to produce videos for the exhibit. We produced three videos for the exhibit. Of course, we had hundreds of hours of film, but for the exhibit one of them is a ten-minute and there are two five-minute videos. They were produced professionally, and they get the job done. It's magic the way these people can take the interviews that you've conducted, take the clips out, and through the manipulation of vision and sound they come off as much bigger than what the original product was. They were produced into those three films, and our hope is that with the stock car interviews we can do the same thing. We had hoped also that we might do an hour PBS documentary, and indeed the rock 'n roll interviews were used for a radio series on Memphis music, using just the audio parts. Now the interviews for Rock 'n' Soul are at the Smithsonian Archives and are in the public domain. The interviews for stock car drivers, about fifty of them, are at the Atlanta History Center, which was basically paying for that interview project against the day when we hope we can do the exhibit and use them.

DR: Museum resources have been slim recently. If that wasn't an issue, what exhibits would really like to do?

PD: Well, I want to do something on what I've written about. Ever since I arrived at the Smithsonian I've lobbied to do an exhibit on Southern rural life. I just put in an exhibit proposal last fall on a major look at Southern rural life from George Washington to Jimmy Carter. Of course, that's a little overly ambitious, perhaps. A lot of it, especially the twentieth century, is based on my research, but I also said it could be based on the research of many of the fellows who come through our museum. There are a lot of people who have studied

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Books By Pete Daniel

- The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South* (1972, 1990)
A Talent for Detail: The Photographs of Miss Frances Benjamin Johnston, 1889-1910 (1974).
Deep'n As It Come: The 1927 Mississippi River Flood (1977, 1996).
Breaking the Land: The Transformation of Cotton, Tobacco, and Rice Cultures Since 1880 (1985).
Official Images: New Deal Photography (1987).
Carry Me Home: Louisiana Sugar Country Photographs (1990)
Standing at the Crossroads: Southern Life in the Twentieth Century (1996).
Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s (2000)

OHMAR Spring Conference 2004 Preview

The OHMAR spring conference 2004 will be held on Friday, March 19 & Saturday, March 20, 2004 in the Archibald S. Alexander Library on the the New Brunswick campus of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Due to the overwhelming response at the OHMAR spring 2003 conference, a full day beginner's workshop is being offered on Friday. Take advantage of the one day experience to learn best practices from professionals in the field, get hands-on experience with equipment, and be exposed to current standards and practices.

The Saturday conference sessions are divided into a morning theme and afternoon round-table talks. The morning's focus will be on military oral history. Hear about regional and national projects from scholars and researchers from the Rutgers Oral History Archives of WWII, Korea, Vietnam and the Cold War, as well as from the Library of Congress Veterans History Project--the largest oral history project in the country. In the afternoon, tackle current issues facing oral historians in a round-table setting. In the company of other professionals, discuss ethics, privacy, dissemination, and the methodology of collecting "contemporary history."

This not-to-be-missed conference is being organized by the staff of the Rutgers Oral History Archives, including Sandra Stewart Holyoak, Shaun Illingworth, and Tom Frusciano. Conference details will be available in fall 2003 on www.ohmar.org, and in the February 2004 OHMAR newsletter. For questions, about the conference, contact holyoak@history.rutgers.edu or illingwo@history.rutgers.edu. For questions about the Archives, call (932) 732-8190 or go to the project's website at <http://fas-history.rutgers.edu/oralhistory/orlhom.htm>. ♦

OHMAR Membership Form

Sign up TODAY to become a new member of, or renew your current membership with, the oral history organization that keeps you informed of regional issues, events, projects and professionals.

Membership is for one calendar year. Member benefits include the newsletters, advance notice of OHMAR events, and reduced fees to the annual conference and workshops. In addition, individual, student and life members may vote, hold office and serve on committees.

Individual (\$25) _____ NAME:
Student (\$10) _____ ADDRESS:
Institutional (\$50) _____
Life (\$1,000) _____ EMAIL:
PHONE/FAX:

Please make your check out to "OHMAR." Please send your check to "OHMAR c/o Kelly Feltault, 415 E. Wayne Street, Silver Spring, MD 20901." Any questions? Please contact Treasurer Kelly Feltault at cultural.xings@mindspring.com.