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# OHMAR Newsletter

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## *OHMAR, MARAC TO HOLD HISTORIC MEETING*

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Oral historians and archivists from throughout the Mid-Atlantic states will gather in Baltimore April 20-22 as part of the first joint meeting sponsored by Oral History for the Mid-Atlantic Region and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference.

Entitled "It's About Time: Archivists & Oral Historians," the joint conference will feature a wide range of programs and workshops as well as tours of Baltimore historic sites and repositories.

Special events will include a presentation by Spencer Crew, director of the National Museum of American History at the Smithsonian Institution and curator of the critically acclaimed exhibition, "Field to Factory." Dr. Crew will address the plenary session of the conference Friday morning.

Friday luncheon will feature segments from "The Annapolis I Remember," a play based on oral histories and photographs of Annapolis from 1900 to 1960, introduced by Maryland archivist and oral historian Mame Warren.

That evening, members of the two organizations will gather at the Baltimore Museum of Industry for a Bull and Oyster Roast, a Maryland tradition that will include, beyond the eponymous dishes, crab soup, barbecued chicken, National Premium beer, and Berger's cookies. Mama Jama, a local band, will provide entertainment.

The program and its associated events are the product of months of hard work on the part of the Program Committee, chaired by Cindy Swanson of OHMAR and Thomas Hollowak of MARAC, and the Local Arrangements Committee, chaired by Elaine Eff of OHMAR and Laurie E. Baty of MARAC.

The conference hotel is the Radisson Lord Baltimore on West Baltimore Street, a short walk from the Inner Harbor and its many attractions,

some of which will be included as part of the wide range of tours offered through the conference.

The program begins Thursday, April 20, with four workshops: A Crash Course in Oral History, Establishing an Archives, Preservation of Audio and Video Media, and Navigating the Internet.

For those not participating in the workshop, five organized tours will take participants to Mount Vernon, Lexington Market, Fells Point, Camden Yards, or on a jaunt around Baltimore by light rail. Those choosing not to take the tours can visit any of the seventeen museums and repositories around the city, from the Babe Ruth Museum to the Walters Art Gallery, for which information will be available at the conference.

A busy schedule of presentations and sessions will follow on Friday and Saturday. The program will conclude Saturday afternoon with three more tours: Learning to Read the Rowhouse, Baltimore by Bus: A Social History, and the Lester E. Levy Sheet Music Collection at Johns Hopkins University.

For information and registration materials, write:

MARAC/OHMAR Spring 1995 Meeting  
c/o Med Chi  
1211 Cathedral Street  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
ATTN: Margaret Burri



**File under errata: OHMAR dues are listed in the conference program at \$8. In fact, the cost is \$10, still a bargain at any price.**

## Book Review

***Doing Oral History, by Donald A. Ritchie.***  
**New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995. \$14.95**  
**paperback.**

This book is not a dustcatcher. It is destined to be dog-eared and full of underlined passages, from the first time you pick it up. In a user-friendly question-and-answer format, much like an oral history interview, Don Ritchie has packed into one modest volume enough practical advice to get an oral history project off the ground, help a novice oral historian conduct a responsible interview, and challenge more experienced oral historians, librarians, archivists, and others who might use oral history to think broadly about the impact of what they are doing.

There is none of the esoterica that sometimes consumes academic historians. Yet in chapters on, for example, using oral history in research and writing, preserving oral history in archives and libraries, and presenting oral history--in formats as varied as stage productions and interactive videos--Ritchie challenges everyone involved in oral history to conduct their activities in accord with the highest professional standards.

"How much of today's oral history will be considered an important supplement to the written documentation of this century, or dismissed as superficial and superfluous? How much of what we do will be preserved, and how much will be lost? Oral historians need to look beyond their own immediate needs to consider the corpus of work they will leave for the future." (xii)

Ritchie makes clear that "there are great differences between usable oral histories and useless ones, and there are far too many of the latter." (6) But it is equally clear, through Ritchie's use of hundreds of examples peppering virtually every question-and-answer segment, that there are plenty of usable oral histories around for those who would learn from wheels others already have invented.

Ritchie, a former president of the Oral History Association and of OHMAR, traces the history of oral history to put the contemporary practice of the craft into some perspective. He draws on his experiences as associate historian of the U.S. Senate, a popular oral history workshop leader, and editor of the Twayne Oral History Series to offer step-by-step advice on everything from organizing an oral history project and conducting

audio and videotaped interviews to managing an oral history collection in a library or archives.

Despite the Q-and-A format, **Doing Oral History** is not a cookbook. Indeed, writing such a book would be impossible, as Ritchie suggests. "For every rule, an exception has worked. Imaginative interviewers are constantly developing and sharing new methods and uses of oral history." (1) Having said that, however, he provides the most succinct statement of "fundamental rules and principles [that] apply to all types of oral history interviewing: do your homework: be prepared; construct meaningful but open-ended questions; do not interrupt responses; follow up on what you have heard; know your equipment thoroughly; promptly process your tapes; and always keep in mind and practice the ethics of interviewing." (57)

The book includes as an appendix the Principles and Standards of the Oral History Association, which Ritchie was instrumental in revising from 1988 to 1991. A separate appendix includes a variety of sample legal release forms. Detailed footnotes and an extensive bibliography offer further paths for readers who want more territory to explore.

*Mary Kay Quinlan*

## Book Notes

***Railroad Ties: Industry and Culture in Hagerstown, Maryland*** is a long look at the people who left the farmstead for the freightyard as the nation's economy changed from an agricultural to an industrial base. The book is based on interviews conducted by OHMAR member Susan Levitas.

For information, contact the Maryland Historical Trust, 100 Community Place, Crownsville, MD 21032-2023. To order, write The Maryland Historical Trust Press/DHCD, Division of Finance/Central Cashier, P.O. Box 500, Crownsville, MD 21032-0500. The cost of the book is \$14; add \$2.50 for shipping.

***Her Excellency: An Oral History of Women Ambassadors*** is a study of fifteen of the trailblazers who led the way in opening up the diplomatic profession to women. OHMAR member Ann Miller Morin is the author of this latest in the Twayne/Macmillan oral history series. For information, write Ann Miller Morin, 3330 North Leisure World Blvd. #808, Silver Spring, MD 20906, or ask your local bookseller. The cost of the book is \$27.95 hardbound or \$16.75 in quality paperback.