



# ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

Winter 2016 Volume L Number 3

## OHA@50: Traditions, Transitions and Technologies from the Field

It was a birthday party befitting an organization of story listeners and story tellers.

Nearly 600 oral historians from around the world celebrated a landmark

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary for the Oral History Association Oct. 12-16 in Long Beach, California.



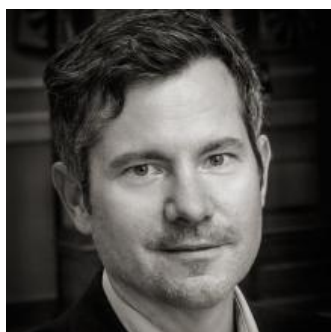
The celebration was a homecoming of sorts for the organization that held its first national colloquium at Lake Arrowhead, in the San Bernardino Mountains about 100 east of Long Beach. That colloquium, according to proceedings of the 1966 event, “dealt with the following aspects of oral history: justifications, uses, directions, approaches, techniques, objectives, and standards for the collection, study, and dissemination of an interdisciplinary range of materials in oral history.”

Fifty years later, many of the themes remain.

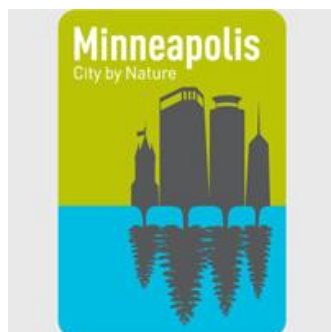
Long Beach conference attendees, joined by members of the Southwest Oral History Association commemorating its 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary, celebrated with a banquet and awards dinner beneath a life-size, 88-foot, fiberglass model of a female blue whale and her calf in the great hall of the Aquarium of the Pacific a short walk from the conference hotel. Twenty OHA past presidents attended, and two attendees—past president Alice Hoffman and Elizabeth Calciano—had participated in the original 1966 Lake Arrowhead colloquium.

Conference participants could choose from more than 100 plenaries, workshops, panels, roundtables, networking opportunities, a tech showcase, poster session and project bazaar, cultural tours and a memorial tribute to OHA's former executive director Cliff Kuhn, who died last year. And as always, the conference created space for serendipitous conversations between oral history strangers who become friends.

Stories throughout this issue of the **Newsletter** offer highlights of some of the conference sessions. The spring issue of the OHA Newsletter will include additional coverage of OHA conference sessions. Stay tuned!



President's  
Report



Share your  
work at 2017  
OHA meeting



Executive  
Director's  
Report

## Members elect new OHA leaders

OHA members elected to leadership positions for the coming year are:

- First Vice President: Natalie Fousekis of the Center for Oral and Public History, California State University, Fullerton

- Council member: Jennifer Abraham Cramer of the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, Louisiana State University Libraries;
- Nominating Committee member: Tami Albin, associate librarian at the University of Kansas;
- Nominating Committee member: Rina Benmayor, professor emerita at California State University, Monterey Bay and
- Nominating Committee member: Chuck Bolton, history professor, University of North Carolina at Greensboro



## Genocide testimonies become teaching tools

If you want firsthand testimony about the Holocaust, of course you will visit (online, naturally) the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive...



## Oral history methods draw scholars from widely different perspectives

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## Ad hoc labor working group organizes solidarity actions

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## Oral history, now (and tomorrow)

If you've ever been to an Oral History Association meeting, you'll know there's really only one theme: What is oral history?

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## Heartfelt thanks to supporters



*OHA past presidents gather at 50th anniversary celebration*

More than two dozen colleges, universities and other oral history-supporting organizations contributed to the 2016 OHA 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary conference. They include:

### 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Sponsors

- Arizona State University
- Audio Transcription Center
- AV Preserve

- Baylor Institute for Oral History
- Center for Oral and Public History, Cal State Fullerton
- Center for Oral History Archives, Center for Oral History Research and Oral History M.A. Program, Columbia University
- Chao Center for Asian studies, Rice University
- Chemical Heritage Foundation
- Institute of Oral History, University of Texas at El Paso
- Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries
- The MediaPreserve
- Middle Tennessee State University: Albert Gore Research Center, Center for Popular Music and Department of History
- Office of Institutional Diversity and Equity, Williams College
- Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, Oklahoma State University
- Oral History Center of the Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley
- Oxford University Press
- Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, University of Florida
- Southern Oral History Program, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- UMass Public History Program and the UMass Oral History Lab
- University of North Texas Oral History Program

### Sponsors

- Center for Oral History Research, UCLA Library
- Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, UGA Libraries
- The Randforce Associates
- Sweetwater Sound
- The Yiddish Book Center's Wexler Oral History Project

### Anniversary Contributors

- American University
- University of Wisconsin-Madison Oral History Program

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# 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Task Force recognized

It takes a lot of work to pull off a big birthday party.

In addition to OHA Interim Executive Director Kristine Navarro-McElhaney and Program Associate Gayle Knight, a volunteer 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Task Force headed by past OHA president Mary Larson did some heavy lifting.

Volunteer task force members included: Terry Birdwhistell, Sarah Blanc, Mary Marshall Clark, Jennifer Abraham Cramer, Rose Diaz, Diana Dombrowski, Ercia Fugger, Alpine Jefferson, Lu Ann Jones, Joan Mandell and Todd Moye.

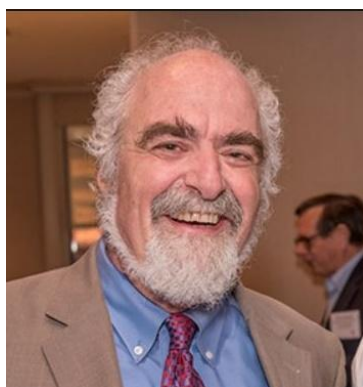
Also on the task force were: Irene Reti, Anne Ritchie, Anna Sheftel, Jason Steinhauer, Alva Stevenson, Sady Sullivan, Jessica Taylor, Cameron Vanderscoff, Claytee White and Stacey Zembrzycki.



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## Kudos to local arrangements group

When OHA members descend on an unfamiliar community for their annual conferences, efforts by local arrangements committee members can help smooth the way. Special thanks to local arrangements chair Karen Harper and her volunteers, including: Kaye Briegel, Stephanie George, Jennifer Kell, Genevieve Maxwell and Al Stein.



## Remembering Cliff Kuhn, 1952-2015

Laughter and tears characterized a memorial tribute conference session for Cliff Kuhn, who died Nov. 8, 2015, after two years as the Oral History Association's first executive director...

[Continue reading](#)

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## Sherna Berger Gluck seen as mentor, collaborator for feminist historians

A panel of women scholars whose paths have crossed that of oral historian Sherna Berger Gluck described a woman who inspired them, challenged them and permanently affected their lives...

[Continue reading](#)



## Scholars, admirers detail oral history contributions of Ron Grele

Ronald J. Grele's career as a historian took him from a position as a young faculty member at California State University Long Beach to Columbia University in New York City...

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## National Park Service uses oral history to document traditions, guide transitions



The National Park Service was already 50 years old when the Oral History Association was in its infancy, and park service employees had been conducting oral history interviews for years...

[Continue reading](#)

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## Roundtable offers perspectives on Studs Terkel as oral historian

Louis “Studs” Terkel was 96 years old when he died in 2008. And in his nearly century-spanning lifetime, he confounded biographers...

[Continue reading](#)



## Remember to renew!

If you haven't already done so, now is the time to renew your Oral History Association membership for continued access to the *Oral History Review*, the *OHA Newsletter*, conference discounts and other membership benefits.

Membership categories include:

- \$75 for regular membership
- \$35 for student membership
- \$1,000 for life membership
- \$450 for organization partner

To renew your membership online, click [Membership](#).





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# President's Letter

by Doug Boyd

When I was first agreed to go up for First Vice President, I remember the OHA Executive Director Cliff Kuhn calling me just minutes after I had accepted. The conversation went something like this:

BOYD: Hello, Nunn Center, this is Doug.

KUHN: Hi Doug, It's Cliff. Thanks for accepting the nomination. You know as Vice President you will be planning the annual meeting in 2016.

BOYD: Right, because I am First Vice President in October of 2014, then Vice President in 2015. That makes sense.

KUHN: You know what this means right?

[Awkward Pause]

BOYD: Uhm, that I will be planning the meeting in Long Beach?

KUHN: You will be planning the annual meeting honoring our 50th anniversary. It will probably be the most expensive meeting ever and we will have to honor everyone so you need to get started now. No pressure, I am sure it will be great. Hey, good to talk with you, I need to run. [Kuhn hangs up]

At that point, Cliff hung up the phone. As most of you know, Cliff Kuhn, the first Executive Director of the Oral History Association passed away later that year. The success of the 2016 annual meeting meant a lot to Cliff. If you knew Cliff, you knew that he loved to talk about OHA business. So, for my first President's report in the newsletter, I have drafted a report addressed to Cliff.

Dear Cliff,

You will be so happy to know that the 2016 OHA annual meeting in Long Beach was, indeed, a great success. We had incredible attendance numbers, (almost 600 attended), we raised a lot of money and connected with many new sponsors. Despite the fact that it was one of the more expensive meetings in history, we actually made money on this meeting. Our workshops were full, our panels were well attended, the presentations were brilliant, and our membership grew.

More important than the numbers, you would have been so proud to see how OHA came together in a big way this year. We celebrated our 50th anniversary just as we had envisioned, by honoring the past while also looking forward. Sarah Milligan and Sady Sullivan were incredible program co-chairs. Remember how we wanted the 2016 annual meeting to capture the spirit of that first meeting in 1966? Together with a phenomenal program committee (far too many names to report here), we designed a program that did just that. We asked hard but important questions, exploring new opportunities for practicing and engaging in oral history practice and interpretation. We explored and considered the implications of technologies that would have been, once, considered science fiction. In every session, this conference explored and discovered new and interdisciplinary perspectives on major themes. We brought together a wide range of diverse perspectives; we pushed the boundaries of genre. The program explored oral history as public history as well as oral history as activism, and we had important conversations about race, gender, identity, community, environment, conflict, oppression, social justice, and memory. We saw new theoretical perspectives begin to emerge and we did a better job connecting to undergraduate and graduate students. I felt that this year's conference was an incredible blend of youth and experience. Finally, this conference asked hard questions about ethics and we did a better job connecting with the archival community by escalating the important conversations on digital access strategies and effective digital preservation. We celebrated the OHA and SOHA anniversaries in a powerful way. Our Labor Working Group led the way in helping OHA successfully navigate our difficult hotel situation and the Local Arrangements committee did a tremendous job opening the Long Beach community to us.

We have much work ahead of us as an organization. We are in the process of finding a new institutional partner, hiring a new Executive Director, as well as replacing the un-replaceable editors of the Oral History Review Kathy Nasstrom and Troy Reeves. Gayle Knight and Kristine Navarro McElhaney (who stepped up to play the role of interim Executive Director) are doing an incredible job keeping us on task and moving OHA forward. Council is working to develop stronger policies and implement our strategic plan. We are working to grow our membership, our finances and, most importantly, effectively represent our membership. Oral history is more popular than ever and the OHA is playing an increasingly central role in leading the way for a whole new generation of oral history practitioners.

Cliff, you would have been proud. I miss you, old friend.

# Interim Executive Director's Report

**By Kristine Navarro-McElhaney**

2016 was a quite a year for the Oral History Association! We celebrated our 50th anniversary in Long Beach with close to 600 of our fellow members, colleagues and friends from across the globe. We saw an increase in membership, and a notable rise in the number of students joining OHA. Our social media footprint has grown extensively. Our volunteer committees did great work to provide oral history resources to educators, expand our international presence, promote diversity and bolster the institutional soundness of OHA moving forward.

Of course none of this would be possible without great leadership. Like many of you, I am grateful for the guidance and stewardship of outgoing OHA President Annie Valk and the members of the OHA Council, who have invested countless hours to ensure that OHA remains the preeminent organization for people committed to the value of oral history. Our good fortune continues with incoming President Doug Boyd, who serves as the Director of the [Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Libraries](#). I am also grateful for the tireless work and attention to detail of Program Associate Gayle Knight.

2017 promises to be a pivotal year in the field of oral history with endless possibilities and opportunities. We are already under way with plans for the annual meeting in Minneapolis October 4-7, with the theme **Engaging Audiences: Oral History and the Public**. We will continue to strive to provide our members with updated and useful information from the field, including our efforts in education, community practice, advocacy and stewardship.

**This year, your active participation in OHA is more important than ever!** There are many ways you can serve – from sharing your ideas and thoughts with us to attending the annual meeting and workshops, serving on a committee, encouraging your colleagues to become members, submitting articles and reviews to the [Oral History Review](#) or supporting scholarships by contributing to the endowment fund.

As always, many thanks for your continued support of OHA and best wishes for a successful year!

## Remembering Cliff Kuhn, 1952-2015

Laughter and tears characterized a memorial tribute conference session for Cliff Kuhn, who died Nov. 8, 2015, after two years as the Oral History Association's first executive director, and who was remembered as an always-enthusiastic historian, father and friend.

OHA past president Stephen Sloan noted Kuhn's enthusiasm for the wide-ranging content at OHA conferences. "Cliff loved every session he went to; there wasn't a session he didn't love."

Another thing he loved, said OHA Program Associate Gayle Knight, was working with students. He would always say after meetings involving students, "aren't they terrific?" she recalled.

Knight said his colleagues at Georgia State University observed that Kuhn had never before seemed so happy or so alive after the OHA chose him as its first executive director.

"It was a great privilege to get to know Cliff," she said.

A Georgia State graduate student recalled Kuhn, his thesis adviser, demanding high-quality work. "There isn't a week that goes by that I don't just really need to talk to him."

Kuhn's widow, Kathie Klein, thanked OHA members and expressed "the deep gratitude of all of Cliff's family."

## Ad hoc labor working group organizes solidarity actions

An OHA ad hoc labor working group, formed after the Marriott Renaissance Hotel in Long Beach became the target of a labor organizing dispute, spearheaded a number of solidarity actions during the OHA conference aimed at showing support for hotel workers.

The labor dispute emerged in January 2016, long after the OHA had contracted with the hotel for the 2016 conference. Canceling the contract would have cost the OHA a \$100,000 penalty.

The OHA Council approved a policy to prioritize booking future conferences at union hotels and to require that future contracts include a cancellation clause without penalty in the event of labor disputes.

To support UNITE-HERE, the labor union attempting to organize hotel workers, the ad hoc working group sold \$10 red, union-made T-shirts that proclaimed “Oral Historians 4 UNITE-HERE,” participated in informational picketing and a rally in front of the hotel and urged conference participants to attend a labor forum at the International Association of Machinists Hall, away from the hotel.

Members of the ad hoc labor working group include: Sherna Berger Gluck, Karen Harper, John McKerley, Paul Ortiz, Rosalie Riegle, Harvey Schwartz and Claytee White

# Genocide testimonies become teaching tools, Shoah Foundation director says

If you want firsthand testimony about the Holocaust, of course you will visit (online, naturally) the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive, <http://sfi.usc.edu/vha>, which has more than 50,000 testimonies from Holocaust survivors, collected primarily during the 1990s in more than 60 countries and 40 languages.

But Stephen D. Smith, executive director of the foundation, told a Friday keynote audience that the efforts to document the stories of survivors of other crimes against humanity has not stopped with the Holocaust. Nor has the foundation ceased to explore new ways to make those stories accessible in the digital age, including recreating scenes using virtual reality and interactive video technology.

"The stories we have been given were intended to be shared," he said.

In recent years, the foundation has added to its archives testimonies related to the 1915 Armenian genocide, the 1937 Nanjing massacre and the 1994 Rwandan Tutsi genocide.

The foundation's extensive online and social media presence and educational outreach reflect its efforts to take advantage of different platforms to repackage and reuse the wealth of material in the archives, Smith said.

"At the hub of what we do is preservation," he said. But the wealth of material and the ongoing reality of crimes against humanity make it imperative for the foundation to extend its educational reach.

"Just because the Nazis are gone doesn't mean evil is gone in the world," he said, adding:

"We all have opportunities to make a difference."

Among its other projects, Smith said, the foundation also is engaged in digitizing and restoring old collections "sitting in closets," transforming them from materials not being seen at all to being available to people everywhere.

# National Park Service uses oral history to document traditions, guide transitions

The National Park Service was already 50 years old when the Oral History Association was in its infancy, and park service employees had been conducting oral history interviews for years, beginning in 1948, by collecting stories from workers at the Vanderbilt Mansion, now a national historic site in Hyde Park, New York.

Over the years, the park service has used oral history interviews to document park service administration, the cultural history of parks and, increasingly, to document lives of people associated with park service sites, such as Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site, Rosie the Riveter WWII Home Front National Historical Park and Manzanar National Historic Site.

And oral histories also are helping the park service document how the role of parks has changed during the park service's second 50 years, in the wake of environmental protection laws, park expansion and changes in employee demographics, NPS oral historian Lu Ann Jones told an OHA conference roundtable.

Allison Steiner, a wilderness ranger at Point Reyes National Seashore in Marin County, California, described a 5-year-old oral history project conducted by the Association of National Park Rangers, a private, nonprofit group of park service employees and retirees. The project, in which younger employees interview older and retired employees, has tapped into a storehouse of information in the experiences of the park service's workforce, more than half of whom are retirement eligible, she said.

The interviews also have revealed critical management shortcomings, she suggested, such as inadequate training for events like park fatalities and inadequate responses to allegations of workplace violence.

One female park superintendent who was interviewed said that NPS management ignored charges of sexual harassment and suggested that the park service is like a family that keeps its secrets.

Steiner noted that the oral history interviews may provide a safe place for park employees to break that cultural silence and said the park ranger association is considering ways to use the oral history interviews to advocate for park employees.

Jones, who has interviewed 30 park service employees in the National Capital Region, said oral history interviews have brought to light important changes in park service culture, paralleling changes in the broader society.

She recounted an interview with Tina Short, an African-American woman who became a ranger at Fort DuPont National Park. Short recalled that as a child she met a mounted ranger at the park and was determined to become one, too. "I wanted to have a horse and a hat," she said. But a teacher told her the park service "didn't have colored people or ladies."

Eventually, of course, the park service had both, and Short, as well as her daughter, became national park superintendents.

Jones has used park service oral history interviews to create a series of podcasts called Centennial Voices to increase public access to the interviews, which also are being incorporated into employee training.

Laurel Munson Boyers, a mounted back-country ranger in California's Yosemite National Park, was the park's first female wilderness ranger in the 1970s. "It was a man's world back there," Boyers said, noting that women previously were blocked from the job because people believed they weren't strong enough to saddle a horse. Some people expected her to fail, Boyers recalled, but she didn't, and ended up spending her entire career in the park. Listen to the podcast here: <https://soundcloud.com/npsoralhistory/laurel-munson-boyers-and-women-in-the-national-park-service>

In sharp contrast to the life of a wilderness ranger, Jodi Morris is a park ranger at Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site in Little Rock, Arkansas, the only public high school that is part of a national park site. The school was a landmark in the school desegregation battles following the Supreme Court's 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision. Nine African-American students desegregated the formerly all-white Little Rock school in 1957, and mob violence ensued. President Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered federal troops to enforce the desegregation.

Morris said that most of the exhibits at Little Rock are based on oral history interviews, which constitute the bulk of the historic collections. There was initial reluctance of the general public, she said, to participate in the park site's call for people willing to share their memories of the desegregation battles.

But the park service increasingly has focused on opening dialogue with communities and on no longer portraying the person wearing the ranger hat as a know-it-all, Morris said.

Local volunteers and students in Little Rock social studies classes have been important interviewers of the Little Rock 9 and other community elders, she said, noting that greater involvement of people in local communities is important to national parks, which belong to everyone.

"We are the keepers of these sites," Morris said. "We're not the owners of them."

# Oral history methods draw scholars from widely different perspectives

The Sioux Indian nation, Southern black gay men and San Francisco's queer community in the 1940s might appear to have little in common.

But three scholars featured in an OHA conference plenary session illustrated how oral history can cross a multitude of disciplinary boundaries.

Over the years, said moderator Donald A. Ritchie, a past OHA president, "We've had just about every possible use of oral history."

Nan Alamilla Boyd, professor of women and gender studies at San Francisco State University, said she was warned against trying to write her dissertation in the 1980s about the history of San Francisco's queer community. For her, oral history was not merely a methodology; it was essential because so few print sources documented information about the 1940s sex workers and cross-dressers in San Francisco that were among the sources for her historical research.

She attempted to establish historical credibility for the interviews with such sources by cross-referencing them against each other.

With a somewhat similar focus on race, gender and sexuality, performance artist E. Patrick Johnson used oral history in his doctoral dissertation—the story of his grandmother's life as a live-in domestic for a Southern white family.

Johnson created a one-man show based on stories of black gay men in the South and is working on a companion project based on oral history interviews with Southern black women. Most of the women who have been interviewed report having experienced sexual trauma at the hands of a male family member, Johnson said, noting that telling one's story in an oral history interview is a way of validating that story.

Moreover, he added, using those stories in an oral history performance has "healing potential."

For historian and human rights activist Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, oral history also emerged in a federal courtroom.

Dunbar-Ortiz was recruited by American Indian lawyer, author and activist Vine Deloria Jr. to be an expert witness on a motion to dismiss charges against nearly 300 defendants, mostly members of the Sioux nation from Pine Ridge, South Dakota, in the aftermath of the 1973 occupation of Wounded Knee, South Dakota.

Dunbar-Ortiz, serving on the legal team as well as in her role as an expert witness, recalled how the testimony by tribal elders evolved into "an extraordinary oral history" of the Lakota people. "There is a lot of rich oral history in court testimony," she said.



## Oral history, now (and tomorrow)

If you've ever been to an Oral History Association meeting, you'll know there's really only one theme: What is oral history?

That's what Stephen Sloan, OHA past president and director of Baylor University's Institute for Oral History, told an OHA plenary session—and he was only partly joking.

He and four other panelists at the Thursday afternoon session pinpointed key developments in oral history in the past half-century and sparked lively discussion from the audience.

Amy Starecheski, co-director of the Oral History M.A. Program at Columbia University, noted that unlike prevailing conditions in the academy at the time of the first oral history colloquium, today's oral historians typically no longer have to fight for legitimacy. She pointed to the growth and democratization of the field and noted a surge of interest in using oral history for social justice.

OHA past president Paul Ortiz, director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida, echoed Starecheski's observations about the role of social justice and social change as elements of oral history. Oral history took off as a discipline in the 1960s during a time of social crisis and social change, he said, with oral historians uniquely positioned to help people tell their stories and bridge differences.

Natalie Fousekis, newly elected OHA first vice president and director of the Center for Oral and Public History at California State University, Fullerton, highlighted the role of feminist thought in the evolution of oral history practice. Oral history interviews, she said, allow women—and all interviewees—to interpret their own lives and experiences. But she noted a growing dilemma oral historians face in recording in-depth, lengthy interviews while at the same time emphasizing a desire for greater access to those interviews.

Sloan noted that the past half-century in oral history has been driven by changes in technology and by the “big-tent-ness” of oral historians making room for various practitioners motivated by a “desire to do something.”

“Good oral history,” Sloan said, “has always been about crisis.”

Doug Boyd, who took the helm as OHA's new president, said his interest in oral history has been shaped by frustration over lack of use of archival collections. Without access, oral histories only have potential impact, he said.

Boyd, who directs the University of Kentucky Libraries' Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, spearheaded creation of the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS), an open-source, web-based application that allows users to quickly search oral history interviews online.

But greater online access to interview content has created a “new frontier” for oral history, he said, creating challenges to the privacy of oral history content and raising the bar for informed consent.

Boyd called it challenging to try to anonymize interviews by stripping out identifying information. A good life history interview includes extensive personal information, he noted, enough so that an unscrupulous reader could use that information to create phony bank accounts.

“There was a safety in archival security,” he said, suggesting that oral historians should consider focusing on doing better interviews instead of doing more interviews.

Fousekis said interviews that have already been collected create opportunities to teach through their rich content.

Past OHA president Rina Benmayor, speaking from the audience, noted that existing interview materials also create opportunities for creative work.

Ortiz noted that performances, along with booklets, teacher guides, DVDs and other low-tech tools have become increasingly important ways to share oral history interview material.

## Scholars, admirers detail oral history contributions of Ron Grele

Ronald J. Grele's career as a historian took him from a position as a young faculty member at California State University Long Beach to Columbia University in New York City—with a number of prestigious stops in between.

And throughout his career, said the five men and women who highlighted aspects of his work, he contributed to the evolution of oral history, challenging practitioners to a deeper understanding of what they're doing and how they're doing it.

- Andor Skotnes of The Sage Colleges described Grele as “deeply committed to social justice,” from his earliest days as a young faculty member.
- Luisa Passerini of the University of Turin and European University in Florence, Italy, speaking via Skype, recalled her long association with Grele, beginning when she met him in 1979 at an international conference at the University of Essex. “We did not believe that an American could be so theoretical,” she said of the scholarly paper he presented.
- Alexander Freund of the University of Winnipeg said Grele's work illustrates that the meaning of an oral history interview isn't self-evident but must be decoded. “We need to read between the lines,” he said.
- John (Jack) Kuo Wei Tchen of the Asian/Pacific/American Studies Program and Institute at New York University said one of Grele's key contributions to oral history practice is emphasizing the importance of asking people if they think their experience is typical of the experiences other similarly situated people have. That practice, Tchen said, forces people to put themselves into a community context.
- Mary Marshall Clark, who now directs Columbia's Center for Oral History Research, noted that Grele has conducted more than 400 oral history interviews and has “a passion for conversational narrative.”

For his part, Grele explained his life's work as reflecting his interest in how people construct history.

“I got involved in oral history because deep down, I knew people had more interesting lives than I did,” Grele said. “People have had lives worth knowing about.”

Grele, who served as OHA president in 1988, said that in the early years, oral history reflected a naïve populism combined with sentimentalism that led to the idea that “people are always right.”

“It's kind of a naïve approach to our work,” he said.

He also lamented what he suggested is an excessive focus on “little stories,” like those StoryCorps collects.

“The story isn't enough,” Grele said. “You're supposed to be doing something called history.”

## Sherna Berger Gluck seen as mentor, collaborator for feminist historians

A panel of women scholars whose paths have crossed that of oral historian Sherna Berger Gluck described a woman who inspired them, challenged them and permanently affected their lives.

She has been their mentor, they said.

“I never, ever identified myself as a mentor,” she insisted. Rather, she prefers calling herself an advocacy oral historian and activist scholar.

Certainly she is those things, but she also is a “mentor extraordinaire,” said Maylei Blackwell, vice chair of Chicano/Chicana Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

“She wasn’t a hold-your-hand mentor,” Blackwell said. “She was a kick-your-ass mentor.”

Blackwell said that until she was drawn into her mentor’s orbit, “I really thought I was going to be a waitress.”

Instead, she became a scholar and activist. “Sherna taught me that activism wasn’t something you did on the side,” Blackwell said.

Autumn Varley of Nipissing University in North Bay, Ontario, Canada, said Gluck’s work taught her that oral history is about building relationships. That lesson proved critical in Varley’s work involving interviews with indigenous interpreters at a Canadian historic site.

Varley said she spent time traveling, eating, crafting and having tea with grandmothers, letting them know she wanted to learn from them. And she didn’t use a recorder. “It was all etched on my heart and in my mind,” she said.

Gluck spent the bulk of her career at California State University, Long Beach, where she was director of the Oral History Program. There, she began an oral history archive that focused not just on university presidents and famous professors, common in many campus oral history collections. Instead, her program collected interviews from a wide range of community members, particularly focusing on women, labor and ethnic histories. As technology evolved, those interviews became the university’s Virtual Oral/Aural History Archive.

Gluck’s notable work also includes the oral history-based “Rosie the Riveter Revisited: Women, The War, and Social Change” and “An American Feminist in Palestine.”

Independent scholar Karen Harper said the ground-breaking feminist oral historian stressed the importance of ethics in oral history. “The core of Sherna’s approach to oral history is respect,” Harper said.

And attendees at the roundtable testified to her respect for them as younger scholars pursuing activist, feminist roles.

“You gave us opportunity, and that is the important thing for younger scholars,” said OHA past president Rina Benmayor. “Thank you, Sherna.”

# Share your work at 2017 OHA conference in Minneapolis

The Oral History Association invites proposals for papers and presentations at the 2017 annual conference in Minneapolis. The meeting will be held Oct. 4-7, 2017, at the Hilton Minneapolis Hotel. The theme of the conference is **Engaging Audiences: Oral History and the Public**. The submission deadline is Jan. 31, 2017.

Oral histories, from their initial creation, address real and perceived audiences. Narrators reflect on their past experiences in dialogue with their interviewers; they do so while recording equipment documents these stories for future listeners that neither participant in the interview process can fully imagine.

Nonetheless, the narrators and interviewers seek to actively engage and manage these audiences through the questions they ask, the narratives they tell, the release and consent forms they sign, and the interpretations and products they create. Archivists seek to preserve and provide access to oral histories for unknown future audiences, and the decisions they make have significant consequence in determining who will be able to encounter these transcripts and recordings

How do these real and imagined audiences affect the work we do and the choices we make as oral historians? How do new methods of dissemination to audiences—podcasts, digital humanities, apps—shape our assumptions, our research, our interpretations, our project designs and our daily work? What is the place for print as we disseminate our oral history work in the future? Are there creative new ways to integrate oral histories into museum exhibitions and theatrical productions?

Oral historians throughout Minnesota have a long and proud tradition of utilizing oral history in creative ways to reach a variety of audiences, whether in museums, schools and universities, public art installations, theater performances or public dialogues. The site of rapid demographic change over the past 20 years, the Twin Cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul have grappled with major social, political and cultural shifts, making the need to understand history and its relationship to the present highly visible in many arenas. With their top-notch museums, historic sites, institutions of higher education and engaged and active citizenry, the Twin Cities offer us an excellent site for our conference.

The Program Committee welcomes broad and diverse interpretations of the conference theme. We especially encourage presenters to think about innovative delivery models including dramatic performance, interactive sessions and use of digital media. We welcome proposals from academics, independent scholars, archivists, librarians, museum curators, web designers, public historians, educators, media artists, filmmakers, journalists, social justice activists, community organizers, playwrights, performers, storytellers and all people working in oral history's continuum of practice.

International presenters whose proposals are accepted may apply for partial scholarships. Small scholarships are also available for accepted presenters and others who attend the meeting.

## Proposal format:

The online submission site is open at [OHA 2017](#).

## Questions? Contact:

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## Roundtable offers perspectives on Studs Terkel as oral historian

Louis “Studs” Terkel was 96 years old when he died in 2008. And in his nearly century-spanning lifetime, he confounded biographers seeking to identify him variously as an author, radio talk show host, political activist and black-listed actor, among other professional pursuits.

But to oral historians, he popularized what it means to ask ordinary people questions about their lives and to listen carefully and respectfully to what they say.

In a roundtable session moderated by OHA past president Donald A. Ritchie, people who knew Terkel recalled his contributions to oral history, which increasingly are being recognized as recordings of his interviews are becoming available through the Studs Terkel Radio Archive, featuring nearly five decades worth of radio programs on Chicago’s station WFMT. <http://studsterkel.wfmt.com/> Access to the archive will make it possible for historians to reexamine Terkel’s interviews, Ritchie noted.

Alan Wieder, author of “Studs Terkel: Politics, Culture, but Mostly Conversation,” described his interviews with people in their 90s who knew Terkel well. “In Chicago, there was groups who believed they owned Studs Terkel,” Wieder said.

He said the legendary Chicagoan had a lifelong commitment to both fighting and documenting white supremacy and racism. And while Terkel was an inveterate story-teller, he also was a passionate listener.

“He believed that without conversation and debate, you couldn’t have democracy,” Wieder said.

OHA past president Michael Frisch recalled lively discussions among OHA members at the 1995 conference in Milwaukee about whether Terkel should be given an award because of doubts over whether he “really was an oral historian.”

Frisch also had harsh words for the New York Times obituary about Terkel, which criticized the Pulitzer Prize-winning author for having an agenda. “Most historians do,” Frisch noted.

“He was an oral historian, and he was very, very good at it,” Frisch added. Terkel listened to his interviewees without sentimentality, respected them and used probing questions to elicit more information. Then he selected material from the interviews and edited it for a broader audience. “That’s what historians do,” Frisch said.

Rick Ayers of the University of San Francisco, author of a teacher’s guide to Terkel’s book “Working,” called Terkel a “border-crosser.”

“He was in a category of his own,” Ayers said, adding: “We need to embrace him as the rebel he was and the transgressor that he was.”

Ritchie noted that Ron Grele, also a past OHA president and retired director of Columbia University’s oral history program, introduced oral historians to Terkel through “Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History,” in which Grele interviewed Terkel and other scholars in which they delved into theories and methods of interviewing.

Grele, who was in the audience, recalled that interviewing Terkel “was like you were at a jazz concert,” a musical genre Terkel loved. “He talked like a jazz orchestra.”

Wieder noted that while Terkel was often described as a journalist or oral historian, he never used those labels himself. Until Terkel died, Wieder said, “He called himself a disc jockey.”