



**ORAL HISTORY  
ASSOCIATION**

NEWSLETTER

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## Five things to know about going to Montreal for 2018 OHA Conference!

1. You will need a passport (and possibly other travel documents, depending on your point of origin). Yes, Canada is our American neighbor to the north, but sometimes even neighbors like to know who's

- coming to visit. So if you haven't been out of the country recently and your passport has expired, start now to get everything in order.
2. The Oct. 10-13 conference is on the Sir George Williams Campus of Concordia University, not at a designated conference hotel. Instead, check out seven hotel options with conference rates on varying dates. You can find them here: <http://www.oralhistory.org/local-hotels-montreal-2018/>
  3. Canadians spend money in dollars, but, of course, they're worth different amounts than U.S. dollars. And they're much more colorful. Plus, Canadians have \$1 and \$2 coins, known, respectively as *loonies* and *toonies*. (I couldn't make that up.)
  4. If you're interested in history—which, of course, you are because you're an oral historian—you might want to visit Montreal's Old Port on the St. Lawrence River. It has been in use since the early 1600s when French fur traders established a trading post there. It's one of many historical and cultural sites conference attendees can explore.
  5. And rest assured, you'll never get hungry in Montreal—or any place in Canada. The nation lays claim to more donut shops per capita than anywhere else in the world
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President's Column



From the Co-Executive Directors

# Storytelling great-grandma starts McCusker on road to oral history

When Kristine McCusker was 7 years old, she already was in training to be an oral historian or a bartender.

She loved to hear her great-grandma's stories about growing up at a time and place that seemed a lot like "Little House on the Prairie." But to tell the stories, she always wanted little Kris to bring her a bourbon and water. "Just a little bit of bourbon," she'd say.

As McCusker remembers it today, great-grandma would take a few sips and ask for "just a little more" bourbon. A few more sips. And a little more bourbon. Before long, the great-granddaughter realized, the ideal combination was bourbon and "just a little bit of water."



"I'd make her double bourbons and water and she'd keep talking," the new co-director of the Oral History Association recalled in an interview.

Between a storytelling great-grandma and a storytelling Irish Catholic dad, McCusker grew up understanding how stories help us understand what makes people tick.

But she didn't formally come by her oral history training until she was working on her master's degree in history at the University of Kansas in the 1990s. "It's like the whole world opened up," she said.

It started with an old photograph from 1948 depicting a KU football player and a World War II veteran trying to integrate a restaurant in Lawrence. She was able to track down the veteran, Robert Stewart, who talked to her on the phone for two hours.

Stewart was the first of 25 people she interviewed for her thesis who had been involved in interracial co-op living groups at the university in those pre-civil rights movement days. McCusker's interest in tracking them down for interviews rekindled a revival of reunions of the interracial co-ops.

McCusker still becomes emotional remembering how Stewart introduced her around at a gathering as the person who wrote the master's thesis about them and the early desegregation efforts. "Mr. Stewart took my

hand, wouldn't let go of me," she said. "I realized I'd made him proud of himself."

In the years since that thesis earned her a master's degree in history, following her undergraduate years at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, McCusker completed a Ph.D. at Indiana University in history, folklore and ethnomusicology, a field she considers to be a logical extension of oral history.

She has interviewed veterans, morticians, pop musicians and women who work as employees in the country music world. She has been teaching at the Middle Tennessee State University since 2000

McCusker is the author of "Lonesome Cowgirls and Honky-Tonk Angels: The Women of Barn Dance Radio" and co-editor of "A Boy Named Sue: Gender and Country Music." She also is working on another book, "Just Enough to Put Him Away Decent: Death Care and Emergence of a Modern South," a project funded by the National Institutes of Health's National Library of Medicine.

McCusker's husband, Larry Puzzo, is a banker, and they have two daughters: 21-year-old Katie Lou and 14-year-old Grace. The family has two dogs and loves to travel, and McCusker's fitness pursuits include participating in triathlons. She did four last year.

McCusker said she is looking forward to being part of an effort to make the Oral History Association "the go-to organization for oral history methodology." It's a research method, she noted, that transcends, subject-area specialties and can attract practitioners from many fields.

Projects under consideration include building closer ties with regional oral history organizations, offering more webinars to provide tools for would-be oral historians and building efforts to support young people pursuing oral history.

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## Kyriakoudes brings multi-faceted interests to OHA co-director post

Middle Tennessee State University history professor Louis Kyriakoudes, the Oral History Association's new co-executive director, is

either an over-achiever or a master of time management. Or both.



He runs a research center with hundreds of oral histories in its collection, testifies as an expert witness at cigarette trials on the history of the tobacco industry, channels his Greek-immigrant father's culinary skills, plays French horn in Nashville-area performing groups and enjoys outdoor activities as an assistant scoutmaster with his son's Boy Scout troop.

But before he was any of those things, he was "Kwata," a 15-year-old Brooklyn-born kid whose dad decided to move the family first to Long Island, briefly, and then to Wilmington, North Carolina, where his thick New York accent got him a nickname that stuck through high school.

The young Kyriakoudes played French horn in the high school band, and one day the newcomer asked a fellow band member to borrow a quarter so he could make a phone call. But "quarter" came out "kwata," much to the amusement of his classmates. So that's what the kids called him.

Kyriakoudes recalls the story as one of many things that intrigued him about the family's move to the South. For the native New Yorker, moving to a small southern city made him feel "part of a cohesive whole" and drove his intellectual curiosity to understand the region in all its complexities and its failures, he said. And he never wanted to move back to New York City.

Kyriakoudes did his undergraduate work in history at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and went on for advanced degrees at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, where he did oral history interviews, and used interviews others had done, for his dissertation on rural-urban migration to Nashville.

His graduate work coincided with the 1995 publication of the first edition of "Doing Oral History," by past OHA president Donald A. Ritchie, which Kyriakoudes said helped him learn the craft by doing it.

Kyriakoudes left Nashville and headed back to Chapel Hill to write his dissertation and while there, he also conducted oral history interviews for the Southern Oral History Program. His interviewing experiences included sessions with tobacco company executives, which led him into digging into the history of cigarette marketing. He has shared his historical expertise in litigation against cigarette makers, although some critics have suggested that serving as an expert witness is not a proper role for a historian.

"I stand by it," he said of his anti-cigarette testimony. "I'm very proud of it." Cigarettes, he said, are a product "designed for addiction," and

the industry's own historical documents support that conclusion as do oral testimonies of smokers.

Kyriakoudes' fascination with the history of the South took him to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where he was director of the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage at the University of Southern Mississippi.

He moved to MTSU two years ago where, in addition to teaching history courses, he also directs the Albert Gore Research Center, whose collections include more than 500 oral histories.

Kyriakoudes' wife, Lisa Eveleigh, formerly was managing editor of Southern Cultures, a quarterly journal published at UNC Chapel Hill. Now at their Nashville-area home, she works as a freelance photographer and public relations practitioner. The couple has three children—Helen and Katherine, both in their 20s, and Michael, 15.

When he's not pursuing professional historical activities, Kyriakoudes likes to cook, a skill he first learned working in his father's diner, and he continues to play the French horn, one of his passions since he picked up the instrument in fifth grade.

And if he's not doing either one of those things, the former big-city kid turned Southerner is likely to be fishing, hiking or camping—decidedly non-New York outdoor activities he's come to love.

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## New program associate brings enthusiasm, public history background to OHA

Oral History Association members who have attended conferences, resolved membership issues or tried to track down information from the OHA executive office in recent years likely encountered helpful program associate Gayle Knight.

Now filling the program associate role, following the OHA's move from Georgia to Tennessee is Faith Bagley, who brings a disparate background and lively enthusiasm to the job.

Bagley, who earned a master's degree in public history last year from Middle Tennessee State University, will handle many of the day-to-day operations for OHA, including membership, budget, administrative tasks,

newsletter formatting and publication and annual conference planning and arrangements.

“I’m really excited about it,” she said in a recent interview.

In her public history program, Bagley focused on museums and collections management and was exposed to oral history from a collections management perspective. She doesn’t have firsthand experience with creating oral histories, but she noted that her museum collections background can add a useful outside perspective and she’s looking forward to learning more.



A native of Naples, Florida, Bagley also brings another important perspective to the program associate position: a background in tax and accounting administration and work as an administrative aide in the MTSU history department.

That’s where new co-executive director Kris McCusker mentioned to her that the OHA gig was open. Bagley said she looked at the job description, and the more she thought about it, the more she realized it would be a good fit for her skills and interests.

Bagley lives in Nashville, which is roughly 30 miles from Murfreesboro, where she enjoys outdoor adventures like hiking and camping as well as exploring good food venues and spending time with her “big and fluffy” Akita dog.



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# President's Column

*By Todd Moye*

As you know, OHA is a little over one month into a major transition. Our executive offices have moved across the state line from Georgia State University to Middle Tennessee State University, where Kris McCusker and Louis Kyriakouides have taken over as co-executive directors and Faith Bagley is our new program associate. Faith will be responsible for our conference logistics, among other things. They bring a unique set of oral history, public history, folklore and administrative skills to these jobs, and we are lucky to have them putting those skills to work for OHA.

I can't imagine that the transition could have gone any more smoothly than it has so far. As a result, OHA leadership now has a little more breathing space and a little more time to look toward putting the finishing touches on some dishes that have been simmering for a while now. Here I'll highlight two of them.

Our newest standing committee, Emerging Professionals, grew out of an idea that bubbled up organically from a few members a few years ago. Council liked their idea of a mentorship program that would pair emerging professionals with seasoned veterans at the annual meeting, thought it successful, and created a task force to manage the program.

At our last board meeting Council decided to transform the task force into a standing committee. Emerging Professionals will continue to manage the formal mentorship program along with other informal initiatives and will advise Council on policies and procedures to make membership in the OHA more valuable for oral historians at the beginning of their respective careers. Their work is obviously crucial to the long-term success of our organization.

From my perspective, this is a great example of how our task forces, committees and Council should work together. Members approached Council with a good idea, Council empowered them to put it in place, and when it proved successful Council institutionalized it.

The Diversity Committee is engaged in another major initiative, our Diversity Fellows program—another example of a good idea that percolated up from membership through a committee, rather than from Council down. This one, however, came with a large price tag, and it has been percolating at the idea stage for a while.

In a nutshell, this program will place a member of an underrepresented group who can demonstrate an interest in making a career in oral history in an institutional oral history program or archive for a few months—or perhaps year-long paid internship focused on the fellow's professional development. OHA and the partner institution would split costs. Our hope is that once a final plan and funds are in place, the committee and Council can move quickly to select the inaugural fellow and partner institution and that we will be able to scale up the number of fellows soon thereafter.

The committee nearly plated the dish last year, but we do have a few more steps to go through before we can serve it. I have tasked the committee this year with identifying potential institutional partners and writing at least a rough draft of a budget and fund-raising plan that Council could begin to implement as early as this year, with a goal of selecting a fellow as early as 2019.

This is a tall order and achieving it will require hours of work from the committee members—and OHA members who aren't members of the Diversity Committee. We will depend on all of you. If you have good ideas that would help us achieve what Council has long recognized as a goal, please get in touch with committee chair Zaheer Ali. If you have an idea about anything else oral history-related percolating in your own mind, let's talk.

# Co-Executive Directors' Letter

*By Louis M. Kyriakoudes and Kristine McCusker*

The last few months have seen a whirlwind of activity as we have overseen the move of OHA's former home at Georgia State University to its new home here at Middle Tennessee State University.

We've attended to many details, from setting up the new office here at MTSU's Peck Hall, to registering the organization as a nonprofit with the state of Tennessee. We've learned new software programs to handle membership and the conference program, and we've transferred OHA's operating accounts to a national bank with branches here in Murfreesboro.

We've welcomed Faith Bagley, a recent graduate from MTSU's public history M.A. program, who is the new OHA program associate. We've also welcomed our student workers, Jordan Alexander, a student in MTSU's public history Ph.D. program, who serves as our graduate assistant, and Bethany Bork, our undergraduate intern.

This smooth transition would not have been possible without the generous and cheerful help of OHA's leadership and staff. First and foremost we want to thank Gayle Sanders Knight, outgoing program assistant, who has helped us at each point in the transition. She has answered our many questions with good cheer. She traveled to Murfreesboro to spend a week with us as we mastered the many ins and outs of OHA procedures.

Gayle's steady hand at the Georgia State University executive office kept the association on track after Cliff Kuhn's tragic passing. All who love OHA and the practice of oral history are in debt to her.

We want to thank the outgoing interim executive director, Kristine Navarro-McElhaney. She bequeathed to us all an organization in sound shape, and her training in accountancy has been a great help to us as we've established our office. Past president Doug Boyd and current president Todd Moye and the current members of Council have all been essential to this successful transition.

As co-executive directors, we have been struck by the dedication, skill, professionalism and sheer love for the association. We look forward to continuing in that tradition as we serve OHA and you, its members.

OHA social media efforts are in full swing. Please keep us apprised of your work, your projects, career milestones, grants and any other accomplishments and good news you want to share. Please send your announcements to [oha@oralhistory.org](mailto:oha@oralhistory.org).

We look forward to seeing you all in Montreal!