



**ORAL HISTORY
ASSOCIATION**

NEWSLETTER

March 2019 Volume Liii Number 1

Reporter's notebook: More pages from the Montreal OHA conference

Couldn't make it to all of the 100-plus OHA conference sessions in Montreal last October? Here's a look at three of the widely varying conference sessions.

A food truck as an interview studio? Winnipeg team figures out how to make it work

So if you ever have the zany idea of doing oral history interviews about food history in an actual food truck—you know, the kind that cooks and sells lunch and snacks along urban sidewalks or at county fairs—you'll want to talk to Janis Theissen of the University of Winnipeg.

And be sure to talk to her first.

She's a history professor in Winnipeg and principle investigator of the Manitoba Food History Project. But she and her project team also have some tips that go beyond typical faculty expertise.

For starters, be prepared to explain to university procurement officials exactly why you want to buy a used food truck. And when you get it, you'll want to protect it from vandalism. Not to mention wading through workplace safety and health standards. And disability accessibility issues. And food handlers'

permits. And exhaust fans. And the cooking equipment and propane tanks.

And while you're at it, you might want to think about interview sound quality in a rather uncontrolled audio environment.

Food and business historian Theissen and her University of Winnipeg colleagues offered OHA conference attendees a crash course in creating interviews in a mobile oral history lab, describing the start-up of a project aimed at documenting how food has been produced, sold and eaten in Manitoba and how that has changed over time.

What better way to do that, the planners concluded, than going out in a food truck to farmers markets and other locations and inviting Manitobans to prepare food that's special to them and talk about its history and personal meanings.

The red-and-white food truck and its blinking neon sign logo (<https://www.manitobafoodhistory.ca/>) is far from just a clever gimmick.

With a \$250,000 grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, project planners laid the groundwork for a serious, multi-year project with detailed, systematic planning that underlies the best oral histories.

Sarah Story, project coordinator and archivist, spent the project's first year setting up processes for the project, in which students of food history and business history are the interviewers. Story's work included creating file structures, naming conventions, a metadata template, key tagging words and other details associated with accurately processing completed interviews.

While some interviewees have enjoyed the experience of cooking in the food truck, that's not the only location for project interviews. For one thing, there are limitations on accessibility, and not everyone feels comfortable in the food truck, Story said.

So interviews have been done at picnic tables and in homes, restaurants, meat markets and other places of business.

Kent Davies, audio technician at the university's Oral History Centre, took on the challenge of recording interviews in an environment full of what he called "low-end rumble"—fans, the sounds of cooking and other ambient noise.

He chose Zoom F1 field recorders with clip-on microphones, which enable interviewees to walk around while they're cooking. And the ambient sound—things like a whirring blender—turns out to be useful for bridging sections of podcasts students are challenged to create.

Davies said students faced challenges working with unfamiliar audio editing software. And they had to do secondary research to provide context for the podcasts. But most importantly, they needed to learn how to tell stories.

"You can't make podcasts until you understand storytelling structure,"

Davies said. So students learned a lot more than just how to conduct an oral history interview.

A podcast series, called “Preserves,” includes episodes about craft brewing, the Greek immigrant restaurant tradition in Winnipeg and a Salvadoran-Canadian chef’s salsa specialty.

About 25 interviews have been conducted, and students already can register for a two-week field course in May, during which they will go out with the food truck to conduct more interviews.

Food photos on the evolving project website will make your mouth water. And eventually, the project hopes to create a Food Truck History cookbook.

Thiessen also envisions partnering with Indigenous communities in the province that are already doing food history research and with others whose research interests focus on food history.

All material collected through the project will be archived at the University of Winnipeg’s Oral History Centre.

Ebola outbreak in West Africa drew oral historians as well as medical responders

More than 11,300 people in West Africa died between 2013 and 2016 in the largest epidemic of Ebola, a lethal hemorrhagic fever, drawing thousands of medical workers, technical advisers and other support staff to a region with limited health care infrastructure.

It also drew oral historians, both during the epidemic and since, whose work has documented the challenges people faced in dealing with a widespread health crisis, a panel told attendees at the 2018 Oral History Association conference in Montreal.

Sam Robson, historian at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s David J. Sencer Museum in Atlanta, said the federal agency mobilized its largest response in history to a disease outbreak, sending technical advisers and others to the affected African nations.

Documenting that response involved collecting artifacts and oral histories that resulted in an exhibit at the museum and online at <https://www.cdc.gov/museum/exhibits/ebola.htm> where viewers can listen to and read oral history interviews of people involved in the crisis response.

Journalist and independent researcher Katherina Thomas, who has lived and worked in Liberia for a decade, characterized the Ebola crisis response as one lacking important connections. Lessons from previous health crises were

ignored, and West Africans were largely sidelined by outsiders responding to the health emergency, she said.

Thomas said oral history interviewing methods were used to trace the path of disease transmission, which spread rapidly in urban slums and was related to complex family relationships.

Sharon Abramowitz of Rutgers University described efforts to establish the Ebola 100 Project, a volunteer-driven, open-source, collaborative archive of 100 (or more) oral history interviews with people involved in the West Africa Ebola outbreak. The initiative encountered funding challenges because it had no institutional home, she said. Nonetheless, experienced interviewers were recruited, and 175 interviews have been completed.

Abramowitz said people involved in the Ebola crisis, whether official responders or not, have had an opportunity to tell their stories in their own way. But the public health establishment, she said, is “resistant to engaging with this material.”

Anita Schroven of the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Germany focused on “researching the researchers.” Her work involved reviewing published scholarly articles related to Ebola research as well as interviewing scientists involved in Ebola research.

Schroven said initially researchers tried to collaborate, but later on, she observed considerable fragmentation and friction across areas of biomedical research related to Ebola. The result, she said, is fragmented networks in which information is not shared in a timely fashion and there are disconnects between clinical and basic research, as well as conflict over “whose reality counts.”

The efforts by oral historians nonetheless have documented important first-person experiences with the Ebola crisis.

One of Robson’s interviewees, CDC epidemiologist Regan Rickert-Hartman, recounted her experience in an Ebola-infected village in Sierra Leone where people kept asking her what to do. “I had no idea,” she said.

One sick child who reminded her of her 4-year-old daughter was taken four hours by ambulance to a holding facility, she recalled. But by the time he got there, “it was too late.” The boy died.

Montreal Holocaust survivors share interviewing experiences

Eva Kuper of Montreal has been interviewed many times, and the Holocaust survivor has some suggestions of note for oral historians.

First, do your homework.

Next, take the time to develop rapport with your interview subject.

And most important, pay attention.

That way you'll avoid doing what Kuper's first interviewer did, slavishly following a questionnaire.

Kuper was born in Poland in 1940, which she'd already told the interviewer.

Then came the next question: What was your occupation before the war?

Despite such occasional interviewing frustrations, Kuper and two of her colleagues from the Montreal Holocaust Museum stressed the value of documenting the experiences of some of the 30,000 Holocaust survivors who came to Canada at the end of World War II.

The Montreal museum opened in the 1970s, Eszter Andor told OHA conference attendees, with the interview project starting in the 1990s. Some 600 interviews have been conducted with survivors, rescuers and other Jews displaced by the war, including Polish Jews who went to Russia and Jewish children who were taken to England for safety.

Putting all the stories together, Andor said, yields a complex picture of the Holocaust and preserves for generations to come insights about society, communities and ways of life that were lost.

Sidney Zoltak was 11 years old when his father pushed him through a barbed-wire fence to safety. He found refuge with a religious Polish Catholic family that hid him for 14 months.

Zoltak, who has been an interviewer for the Shoah Foundation, now attends child survivor conferences, presenting workshops encouraging survivors to speak out and tell their stories. Some take a long time to get comfortable recounting their experiences, and every survivor will leave out certain things that are difficult to talk about, he said.

Zoltak, who was 8 years old when the war broke out, said that when he talks about survival, he does not start with the war years. He starts before that, describing his Jewish community of 7,000 people that was decimated.

"It's important to know that not only people were murdered, but also a community and its customs and institutions," he said.

The Montrealers emphasized the importance of oral history interviews with survivors as an important way to reach school children and teach them about the Holocaust.

"We survivors," Zoltak said, "are not going to be here forever."

To explore the Montreal Holocaust Museum's collection, visit:

<https://museeholocauste.ca/en/>

Oral History Review welcomes new copy editor

Longtime *Oral History Review* copy editor Elinor Maze, former senior editor at the Baylor University Institute for Oral History, has handed over her green eyeshade.



Elissa Stroman of Texas Tech University has joined the *OHR* team as the new copy editor. Like Maze, she has a wealth of experience with oral histories.

Stroman is the audio/visual unit manager of the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library at Texas Tech University. Since 2010, she has overseen the audio and moving image holdings of the archive, which includes almost 13,000 oral history interviews.

She received her Ph.D. in Fine Arts with a musicology emphasis from Texas Tech in 2016. Her dissertation explored Gilded Age print culture and performances of American musical femininity. Her oral history interviews primarily focus on women's fine art social clubs and Texas cultural history.

Stroman also is the associate editor of the *West Texas Historical Review*.



Co-Executive Directors Report

Poster submissions being accepted for 2019 OHA conference

If you've just completed a project you'd like to showcase or have research in progress to share, consider proposing a poster for the Oct. 16-19 OHA conference in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The conference poster session and project bazaar is a chance for informal presentation and conversation about oral history work, benefiting both presenters and visitors who have a chance to interact with one another more casually than in a structured panel session.

The conference theme is "Pathways in the Field: Considerations for those Working In, On, and Around Oral History," but other timely subjects of interest to oral historians also will be considered.

Here are the submission rules: Proposals should include a title and a description of how the poster or project relates to the theme. Abstracts can be up to 250 words. Please provide information about how the display will convey

information visually. Because OHA evaluates only the abstract in its decision, be sure that it clearly conveys the purpose of your presentation.

The final deadline for submissions is **July 8, 2019**, but submitters will be notified on a rolling basis. The online submission portal is available [here](#).

Tom Charlton, longtime Baylor University oral historian and past OHA president, dies at age 82



Tom Charlton, who served as president of the Oral History Association and whose welcoming presence was a feature at OHA conferences for decades, died Jan 25, 2019.

Here's a complete obituary recounting his remarkable life:
<https://www.oralhistory.org/2019/02/13/remembering-tom-charleton-1936-2019/>

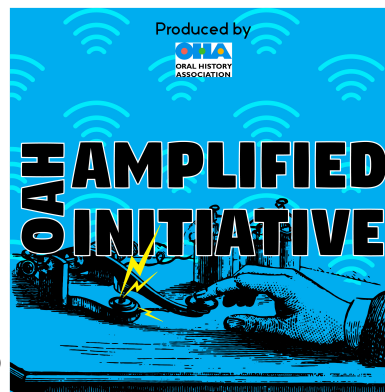
Podcasts expand reach of OAH conference sessions

Busy oral historians can't get to every conference that might be of

interest. But the Oral History Association, in partnership with the Organization of American Historians' Amplified Initiative, is making it possible to listen in absentia to conference sessions.

The OHA has developed six podcasts based on a number of panels recorded at the OAH's 2018 conference in Sacramento, California. The podcasts all relate in some way to oral history and are available free of charge to anyone with a digital connection and the time to listen.

You can find the podcasts [here](#). They are also available on iTunes Apple Podcasts and Google Play. To hear the original panel recordings, visit this [web page](#). Click "Preview" and then click on the Session Audio of the panel you want to hear.



Dartmouth Digital History Initiative seeks postgraduate fellowship applicants

If you're interested in exploring ways to link oral history and the digital humanities, Dartmouth College has an opening for a postgraduate fellow that might be perfect for you.

The fellow would serve as project manager for the Dartmouth Digital History Initiative (DDHI). Launching in July 2019, the DDHI is a multi-year project to develop a suite of digital tools for use with digital collections of oral history interviews. These open-source tools will enable users to easily analyze and visualize data drawn from large sets of oral history archives, and to produce digital products such as geospatial maps, timelines, graphs or charts.

The DDHI and this two-year postgraduate fellowship are funded by a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission of the U.S. National Archives.

As DDHI project manager, the postgraduate fellow will join our team of historians, archivists and digital humanists to collaborate on the design and testing of the DDHI digital tools. Reporting to the project director, the fellow will manage all major components of the project, including the development of new oral history metadata practices and the creation of a tag library for

use with oral histories.

The fellow will also coordinate the team's work with the information technology consulting firm that will be responsible for developing the software. In addition, the fellow will supervise the training and work of undergraduate students on the project, and participate in outreach efforts to groups of prospective users, both locally and nationally.

Candidates must have an advanced degree (MA or PhD) in library and information science, oral history or a related field. Project management experience is preferred, as well as familiarity with digital content management systems such as Omeka, Scalar or Wordpress. Knowledge of Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) markup practices is a plus.

To apply please submit a letter of interest and supporting materials at <https://apply.interfolio.com/60689>. Review of applications will begin on March 31 and continue until the position is filled.



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Co-Executive Directors Report

By Kristine McCusker and Louis Kyriakouides

It has been a year since the Executive Office moved from Georgia State University, and we are thankful that we are not nearly as busy this January and February as we were this time last year. This has given us time to attend to some bigger projects.

For example, Faith Bagley, our intrepid program associate, has been moving our website from a server at Michigan State University to Go Daddy. It has been a relatively glitch-free process, thanks to Faith's hard work, but we're still making the changes and figuring out where the transition did not go smoothly. Thanks for your patience while we finish this process.

Among the new projects we're pursuing is the first ever OHA-sponsored trip to Cuba, guided by Charles Bittner, who will be leading our group on a tour in December. We'll be releasing details soon. We're also working on our first webinar, most likely one on oral history podcasting, that will come out in June.

At the same time, we're busily planning the next OHA conference, which will be in Salt Lake City. Thanks to the Program Committee, Allison Tracy-Taylor, Adrienne Cain and Carlos Lopez for their hard work in putting together the call for papers. It promises to be a terrific conference in a beautiful area. We hope you'll join us.

Finally, our doctoral student, Jordan Alexander, has left us to complete his required third year internship. We are grateful for his hard work and wish him the best. Jennifer Ruch, also a doctoral student, has replaced him and has taken over the social media for the organization. Welcome, Jenn!