



# ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

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## OHA conference moves online for 2020

In a first for the Oral History Association—and most everything else you can think of—the fall conference is moving online in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

The President's Letter and Executive Director's Column give some of the background and preliminary details.

Additional information will be shared as soon as it's available.

## Coming up next month...

A special edition of the *OHA Newsletter* will reach your inbox next month with information about candidates for OHA elective offices, along with details about online voting this summer.



President's Column



Co-Executive Directors' Report

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## National, regional oral history groups endorse OHA statement on killing of George Floyd

At least eight national and regional oral history organizations have signed on to the Oral History Association's recent statement decrying the police killing in Minneapolis of an unarmed Black man.

The OHA statement about George Floyd's death and the subsequent national public outcry about police brutality and systemic racism notes in part:

"The Oral History Association stands in solidarity with the family of Mr. Floyd, Black Lives Matter, protestors and communities of color, and we echo this call for change. The killing of George Floyd is not an isolated incident, but another event in a long history of state violence and brutality toward people of color in the United States—a history that predates our country itself."

You can find the full OHA statement and the list of co-signers here:  
<https://www.oralhistory.org/2020/06/05/oha-statement-on-the-killing-of->

# OHA emerging crisis grants aid projects in Puerto Rico, Virginia

A contemporary project documenting experiences in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria and a project focusing on a Virginia community that was a stopping point for freed slaves have been awarded grants from the OHA's emerging crisis research funds.



In Puerto Rico, Ricia Chansky's "Mi María" project is a large-scale public humanities project that uses oral history and other biographical methodologies—contextualized in critical disaster studies and environmental humanities—to study the impacts of Hurricane María on the people of Puerto Rico while working to resituate the national narrative from stories about the people to those by the people.

This new phase of the project, "Sheltered in Place," works to understand connections between the climate emergency and the public health crisis of covid-19 in marginalized and underserved communities that are disproportionately impacted by both. A secondary objective of this project is to devise methods for creatively listening to and circulating life stories in a time of necessitated physical distancing.

The project will receive \$3,682 from the OHA.

In Virginia, Sierra Holt, the second emerging crisis grant recipient, is producing oral histories of the descendants of the community who live in or near Lambert Lands, which became the home of newly emancipated people from Bedford County, Virginia in 1843. After establishing their settlement,

this group obtained a deed, built a church and developed the oldest Emancipation celebration, which continues today.

They also were a stopping point for those escaping slavery in the South. Since its creation, the legacy of Lambert Lands has continued despite threats of violence from the Ku Klux Klan, growing poverty in Appalachia and numerous drug epidemics. To fully comprehend the history of this community, Holt will also research and interview distant relatives who hold knowledge of the community's origins in Bedford County, Virginia.



Holt plans to donate the interviews to a library or archive housed at an academic institution or museum, particularly one that is focused on Southern and/or Appalachian Black history. Holt was awarded \$318 from the emerging crisis fund.

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# President's Letter

June 25, 2020

Greetings, all. I'm writing to give you a brief but important update on our 2020 Annual Meeting.

For the safety and well-being of presenters and attendees, we've decided to forego our traditional in-person conference this fall and are shifting to a virtual format. Registration will be delayed a bit, but please know we're working diligently to open it. Sessions will be held primarily on Zoom. The program schedule is still being developed, and the Program Committee will provide presenters and attendees information and instructions on how to participate in virtual sessions.

We still plan to hold our keynote address, plenaries, pre-conference workshops, business meeting and networking events, as well as provide access to virtual tours. As information on these events and how to participate virtually becomes available, I will let the membership know. Finally, in accordance with Maryland social-distancing orders, we also plan to offer regionally oriented in-person programming in Baltimore in October. Expect more information on these events soon.

We are working with the Hyatt Regency Hotel to rebook our meeting there for 2023, and we look forward to experiencing the city of Baltimore then.

I'm also happy to announce the OHA has been awarded a CARES Act Grant of \$43,460 from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The grant will support staff salaries and allow us to host a curated collection of sessions and events from the 2020 Annual Meeting on our website.

There are more updates and information to come, and I thank you for your patience as we work to shift the meeting to a virtual one. This is uncharted territory for us, but I'm confident the 2020 Virtual Annual Meeting will be engaging and enriching.

Beyond this, I hope you all are staying safe and sane.

Best,

Allison K. Tracy-Taylor  
OHA President

# Executive Director's Column

**By Kristine McCusker**

June 2020

Greetings from the Executive Office as we all continue to social distance and work from home. Middle Tennessee State University has reopened a bit, but with the high rates of covid in Rutherford County, we decided we would wait until the numbers fell before reconvening in our campus office. If you try to reach us, it's still best to email us at [OHA@oralhistory.org](mailto:OHA@oralhistory.org) at least until August.

By now, you have read President Allison Tracy-Taylor's column informing you of the switch from a face-to-face conference to an all-virtual one. This was a necessary step, given the coronavirus uncertainties and our unwillingness to put our membership in unsafe situations. Thankfully, we have the good advice from the American Council of Learned Societies and the experience of other professional organizations to guide us in our negotiations with our conference hotel in Baltimore. That expertise guided our successful renegotiation of the contract with no financial penalties. We are grateful to our peer institutions for their good advice throughout these difficult months.

Thanks to Louis Kyriakoudes, OHA's co-executive director, we have also been awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities grant for more than \$43,000. This has been Louis' covid-quarantine project: to see what money the federal CARES and other legislative acts might have to help us weather the economic downturn associated with the virus. The NEH money will pay for some employment costs as well as assist us in putting on the virtual conference.

Finally, we are grateful to Vice President Dan Kerr, Program Co-Chairs Kelly Navies and Shana Farrell and Local Arrangements Co-Chairs Catherine Mayfield and Linda Shopes for their hard work on submitting a \$10,000 grant to the Maryland Humanities Council. While they were not successful (covid was the culprit here), we're grateful for their efforts in writing this grant.