



ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

Newsletter

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Circle annual meeting dates now

While some Oral History Association members might be bundling up in blizzard conditions, it will warm you up to mark your calendar now for the 2022 annual OHA meeting set for Oct. 19-22 in Los Angeles.

The [Millennium Biltmore Hotel](#) will be the site of the OHA's first IRL meeting after two years of connecting in little rectangles on computer screens.

The theme of the 2022 meeting is "Walking Through the Fire: Human Perseverance in Times of Turmoil." Expect sessions that focus on the multiple forms and definitions of turmoil and the role oral history has played in highlighting humankind's response.

Stay tuned for updates as the year unfolds.

New OHA Indigenous Caucus emerging

A conversation among a group of Indigenous oral historians at a 2021 OHA conference session is leading to formation of a new OHA Indigenous Oral Historians Caucus.

Sara Sinclair, one of the caucus organizers, said the group is still drafting a mission statement, but formalizing the caucus will "create a visible space for Indigenous oral historians to meet, gather and support each other's work."

In addition to Sinclair, organizers include Francine Spang-Willis, Winona Wheeler, Midge Dellinger, Farina King, Rob Innes and others.

“Through our connection, we strive to amplify Indigenous voices within the field and promote the sustainability of this work for our practitioners,” Sinclair said. “And we look forward to sharing more details soon!”

[President's Letter](#)

[Executive Director's Report](#)

Updates from the OHA office

- The deadline to submit a proposal for the 2022 Annual Meeting has been extended to March 4! See the [Call for Proposals](#) for more information and for instructions on submitting.
- The OHA Executive Office has a new phone number: 615-624-2688.

Two OHA task forces move the needle on social justice practice, valuing oral history

Pending member review and approval, the OHA's suite of [principles and best practices documents](#) will be joined by Guidelines for Social Justice Oral History Work, which has been in development since January 2020.

The proposed document focuses on practices that emphasize co-creation of oral history projects with often vulnerable communities and centers their interests “over institutional practices, which historically normalize the institution's own standards as the only standard.”

“Academic validation, institutionally-driven oral history projects, funding fixation, preservation expectations and research interest must be subordinate to community stipulations,” the social justice task force says. “Ethically-centered oral history projects avoid extraction, exploitation and entrenched power structures.”

The task force report includes recommendations for reconsidering aspects of project planning and of processes before, during and after interviews take place. It includes a discussion of privacy and access issues and advocates “rolling consent,” in which narrators might periodically alter aspects of their consent as circumstances change.

The task force, co-chaired by Nishani Frazier and Cliff Mayotte, included a wide variety of oral history practitioners, reflecting diversity in race, gender, sexuality, age,

region and institutional/non-institutional affiliation.

“These participants translated their professional experience into a set of principles that embodied a more nuanced and complex outline of models for ethical practice,” the task force says in its proposed guidelines.

Sarah Milligan, OHA Council liaison to the social justice task force, said the work emerged from the process leading to the 2018 revisions to the OHA Principles and Best Practices. OHA members commented that the revisions should more specifically address concerns related to oral history and archives and social justice-centered oral history practice.

Members approved in 2019 a document on [oral history and archives](#) and the OHA Council then created the social justice task force to address those concerns.

A second task force has been picking up work originally begun in 2015 to draft guidelines aimed at helping members document the value of oral history work when it comes to promotion and tenure. The task force is aiming to have draft guidelines in hand at the OHA fall meeting.

The task force, co-chaired by Mary Larson and Leslie McCarthy, is tasked with creating relevant and useful guidance not only for academic oral historians, but also for oral historians in libraries, museums, historical societies and other settings, to advocate for the value of their work.

The task force is expected to seek information from people working in a range of post-secondary institutions, other institutions that employ oral historians, junior as well as senior scholars and people who have served on promotion, tenure and hiring committees.

OHA members interested in sharing ideas with the task force can do so [here](#).

These documentary editors don't mimic Ken Burns

Members of the Association for Documentary Editing are quite accustomed to wryly telling people they're not colleagues of Ken Burns. But they may well prove to be welcome colleagues for oral historians.

While OHA members may employ Ken Burns-like techniques in creating video presentations that incorporate oral histories and other materials, the documentary editors of the ADE are more likely to be deciphering historical and literary documents like the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition or the letters of Willa Cather.

And increasingly, according to ADE communications chair Michael Cohen, documentary editors, like oral historians, are working to make their materials more widely accessible to broader audiences.

Cohen, an American University research professor, heads a project to decipher and publish the correspondence of 19th-century presidents [Zachary Taylor and Millard Fillmore](#). He also has worked on the papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony and was the final editor of a 14-volume publication of the letters of President James K. Polk.

It's the work of documentary editors that makes it possible for people to access and analyze original historical materials in much the same way oral historians employ contemporary interview recordings and transcripts to engage students and other community audiences. The Taylor and Fillmore project, for example, has created [lesson plans for teachers relating to the U.S. annexation of Texas](#).

ADE Secretary Katie Blizzard, a research editor at the University of Virginia's Center for Digital Editing, said documentary editors' interest in digitizing materials for wider distribution led her to discover an overlap with the interests of oral historians, particularly as they relate to best practices for work flow, metadata standards and other aspects of online accessibility for text, aural and visual documents.

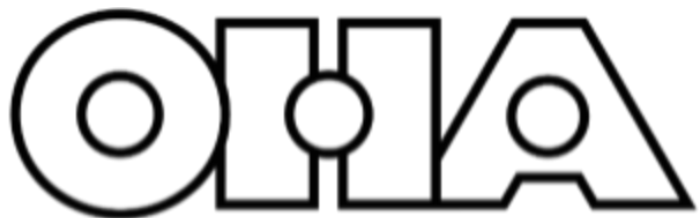
Moreover, oral historians and editors of historical documents also may share similar challenges in deciphering illegible handwriting or inaudible passages in recordings.

Cohen and Blizzard said the [ADE](#) wanted to reach out to other scholars, such as OHA members, to explore such complementary interests.

The documentary editing group includes about 250 members, most of whom are affiliated with institutions of higher education and historical societies and most are historical or literary scholars. The ADE's membership also includes some independent scholars and people interested in personal projects that may involve editing collections of family letters, for example. The organization publishes an e-newsletter and can be found on various social media in addition to its website, which features an array of helpful resources.

The organization hosts an annual conference, with this year's set as a virtual meeting from June 23-26. Additional programming also will be scheduled during the weeks before and after those dates. The call for proposals, with a submission deadline of April 5, is available [here](#).

This year's conference theme is "Communities of Editing," and the organization welcomes proposals from people engaged in various forms of documentary editing, even though they might not call it that, Cohen said.



ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

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Executive Director's Report

By Kristine McCusker
February 2022 Newsletter

The OHA Executive Office is happy to report that we are well along our National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship grant. We received almost 180 applications for year long and short-term fellowships, and our committee of panelists, led by Kelly Navies, is hard at work evaluating the outstanding submissions. We will be notifying successful applicants by the end of March. We are delighted to have the opportunity to promote such outstanding oral history work with these NEH grant funds. Co-Executive Director Louis Kyriakoudes and President Amy Starecheski are hard at work overseeing the program. Thank you to everyone, especially Program Associate Faith Bagley, who has participated in making this a success.

The Executive Office search is going forward. We have been working with the Task Force to ensure that the transition to the next Executive Office is seamless and that it continues OHA's trajectory of growth and success in promoting oral history. The change will occur in December 2022.

We are on track to have a successful in-person conference Oct. 19-22 at the Millennium Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles. At the Midwinter Council meeting in early March, the Council will be on site and ensuring that the various health protocols and potentials will provide a safe and meaningful conference. We look forward to seeing everyone in person!

President's Letter

By Amy Starecheski
February 2022 Newsletter

Dear OHA Members:

I hope you and yours made it through the omicron surge and are perhaps enjoying some opening up of life as we begin to look towards spring. In New York City we are beginning to have some warmer days in the mix, and the citywide mood on those days is ecstatic. I am eagerly waiting to see what it will feel like when the flowers come out.

The team at OHA has been busy during the long, dark winter. Our standing committees and awards committees are now all filled for the year and are hard at work. Standing committees and task forces are four months into their 2021-22 plans and getting ready to submit mid-winter reports. After two years of convening online, Council has decided to resume in-person meetings for mid-winter, and we're all getting ready to travel to LA, where we will try out the Annual Meeting hotel. We will be sure to share our restaurant-scouting results with you via the local arrangements committee.

Over the past few years, Council and the Finance Committee have been talking about how to make use of our endowment, and have gradually shifted our approach. OHA's endowment provides financial security and institutional stability, and it took the work and generosity of many, over many years, to build it up to a point where it could effectively serve those roles. Our bylaws and standing resolutions allow us to use up to 5% of the endowment (based on an average of its value over the past three years) in any given year, but as we focused on building it, our general aim was to reinvest any income.

In the past few years, due to smart management, a robust stock market and a transfer of excess cash on hand into the endowment, our endowment has grown substantially. As of late February, the value is \$744,710, and we are able to use up to \$30,000 of the income this year. As the endowment grew, we began to feel that we could use the income it produces in a more intentional way to support and grow the OHA.

This year, we decided to use up to \$15,000 of those funds to support the implementation of our [strategic plan](#), and to allow our task forces and standing committees to lead that work. We created an open process where committees and task forces can request funds to support their projects, and Council will be evaluating and responding to those requests when we meet in March. Stay tuned for news of what our committees create!

We also allocated endowment income to support our transition to a new executive office at the end of 2022, when our contract with Middle Tennessee State University expires.

We have also continued to talk about how best to support and acknowledge the labor that goes into making the OHA the lively organization we all enjoy and create truly inclusive paths to leadership and service. As part of the opening up of committee funding requests, I drafted [a document that explains who the OHA pays, and for what](#), thinking that this document may also be useful as part of a larger conversation about labor in the OHA. As a next step in that conversation, I will be convening a gathering this spring for current and recent OHA volunteers to share what has made service possible for them, as well as barriers to participation. If you'd like to help organize and shape that conversation, please let me know.

Speaking of leadership and service, we are planning for OHA elections. This year members will be electing a new first vice president, two new members of Council, three new members of the Nominating Committee, and a brand new Committee on Committees, which will lead a more inclusive and transparent process of appointing members to OHA's standing committees (until now the president has done this). We put out a call for volunteers and nominations for all of these roles, and Nominating Committee and Council will be working in March on creating slates for those elections. If you're interested in running, it's not quite too late! You can contact me (aas39@columbia.edu), or the [Nominating Committee co-chairs](#).

It is truly an honor to serve OHA and an inspiration to see all of the care and energy you all put into your work, this field and this organization.

With gratitude,

Amy