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IN THIS ISSUE

President's Letter | Executive Director's Report |
Directors' Column: Modern, responsive design upgrades OHA web presence |
Please welcome Hailey Vinson, OHA's new program associate |
Indigenous college students' project seeks to document Lumbee tribal history |
OHA 2024 annual meeting update |
Paul Ortiz honored as Brooklyn College's Hess Scholar-in-Residence |
Get involved: call for nominations for OHA governance roles |
In Memoriam: Ronald J. Grele

PRESIDENT'S LETTER



By Kelly Elaine Navies

*I've known rivers:
I've known rivers, ancient as the world, and older
than the flow of human blood in human veins,
My soul has grown deep like the rivers*

So opens the famous poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by Langston Hughes. Hughes was born on Feb. 1, 1901. His birthday marks the beginning of Black History Month.

Our next annual meeting takes place from Oct. 30-Nov. 2, 2024, in Cincinnati, which lies on the banks of the Ohio River. Historically, this was the border between the "free" state of Ohio and the slave state of Kentucky. It is a storied place, full of our tremendously difficult, and equally inspiring, American history. In fact, Harriet Beecher Stowe set her abolitionist novel, Uncle Tom's Cabin there. Likewise, Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, Beloved, is also set in Cincinnati. It's no surprise then that the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center is located there, as well.

By now, you have either already submitted or are planning to submit your proposal for the OHA annual meeting. Remember, proposals are due Friday, Feb. 23. We are looking forward to the usual array of innovative oral history proposals in response to this year's theme of "Bridging Past, Present and Future." And I know that OHA Vice President Troy Reeves is busily at work on preparations for this event.

Presently, in the OHA Executive Office, we are welcoming a new program associate, Hailey Vinson. We are thankful that outgoing program associate Bethany Stewart helped us to ease the transition, and Hailey has hit the ground running.

It is also the Lunar New Year, and according to Chinese astrology, this is the Year of the Dragon, promising abundance and good fortune. Additionally, it represents authority--something to think about as we head towards a Presidential election with monumental implications at home and abroad.

What stories shall we pass on to the next generations about this time of war, increasing inequality and division? Hopefully, in the tradition of Hughes, Stowe and Morrison, there will be epic sagas and poems about oral historians who continued to work towards the possibilities of peace and justice, for all.

*I've Known Rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.*





Lu Ann Jones, 2016 NPS training at White Grass Ranch in Grand Teton National

NPS ^{Park}

recognizing that OHA resources will play an important role assisting existing NPS projects as well as launching new initiatives.

For decades, oral history has been an essential method of historic preservation used to document and manage the resources the NPS preserves and protects and to help parks tell relevant stories. The significance of oral history for the NPS is reflected in the scores of parks and programs that have used, and continue to use, oral history interviews to chronicle the people and events they commemorate and to capture the history of individual parks and the NPS as a government bureau.

People who have shared their stories include: Civilian Conservation Corps alumni; the families, friends and neighbors of former presidents; immigrants who stepped ashore at Ellis Island; veterans of World War II and war-time workers on the home front; Japanese Americans incarcerated during the war; foot soldiers and leaders of the Civil Rights Movement; Native elders in Alaska; members of tribal groups whose ancestral homelands became national parks; and NPS personnel who promoted changes in policies and programs in the 20th century.

Interviews record information not found in written archives. They bring history alive for visitors as they enrich interpretative programs and exhibits. They also offer crucial evidence for NPS historical, cultural and administrative histories.

OHA members and affiliate university programs have led major oral history projects for the NPS for decades. In the 1980s, the University of Alaska Fairbanks began a long-term partnership with NPS units to use oral history to document experiences of Alaska Natives and newcomers, including NPS personnel. The results are shared worldwide through Project Jukebox, the oral history program's pathbreaking digital humanities site. More recently, in the early 21st century, Todd Moyer guided the interviewer team for the Tuskegee Airmen Oral History Project, and the UC Berkeley Oral History Center collaborated with the NPS to produce [Rosie the Riveter/World War II American Homefront Oral History Collection](#).

Since 2009 the NPS Oral History Program, part of the Park History Program, has invested in and promoted oral history best practices by sponsoring popular Service-wide trainings and specialized workshops for regions, parks and programs. The [NPS Oral History website](#) shares training resources and describes the array of ways the NPS uses oral history interviews. NPS oral history interviews, comprising audio recordings, transcripts, release forms, notes, and background research, are archived in park museum collections or in the NPS History Collection at Harpers Ferry Center.

Central to the growth of oral history training and programming in the National Park Service over the past 15 years has been the work of OHA life member Lu Ann Jones. From 2009 until her retirement last month, the focus of Lu Ann's work was creating a

Executive Director's Report

By Stephen Sloan

The Oral History Association is thrilled to announce the signing of a memorandum of intent with the National Park Service. The OHA and NPS share a mutual interest in the protection, restoration, maintenance, preservation, interpretation and promotion of the National Park Service along with the people, legacies and stories associated with each site.

With this agreement, the acknowledges the need for and welcomes the offer of assistance through this partnership,

comprehensive oral history program for NPS. She has trained scores of NPS personnel in how to design good oral history projects and how to conduct, preserve and share interviews. She also created an archive of interviews with long-time NPS employees, including efforts that focused on civil rights and women in the NPS. Lu Ann also co-produced and hosted a [podcast series](#) based on oral history interviews, “A Sense of Place: Stories of Stewardship from the National Park Service.”

A longtime contributor to the OHA, it was also Lu Ann’s commitment to our practice and association that led her to help shepherd the effort of OHA signing an official MOU with NPS. This agreement, supported by Turkiya Lowe, chief historian of the National Park Service, empowers NPS staff and the membership of the OHA to officially collaborate. The OHA will be recognized as the primary organization that the NPS works with to facilitate all aspects of oral history practice and is the first step towards creating an overall master agreement for the contracts and agreements for services that exist and will exist between the OHA and the NPS.



DIRECTORS' COLUMN



Modern, responsive design upgrades OHA web presence

By Steven Sielaff

The Oral History Association is very pleased to present to its membership and the world at large our brand-new [OHA Website!](#)

When I considered wider goals for my first year as associate director, a modern and responsive design upgrade to our web presence was at the very top of my list. What eventually coalesced as the end product is the result of months of discussion, planning, review and execution throughout OHA’s organizational leadership structure. I personally would like to thank OHA Council for approving and funding first the evaluative work of assessing all of OHA’s online offerings, then the actual redesign contract that made this vision a reality.

I would also like to thank OHA Past President Tomás Summers Sandoval for creating the OHA Website Redesign Advisory Task Force to aid us in this endeavor, and its members (Rina Benmayor, Shanna Farrell, Catherine Mayfield, Ryan Morini and Jessica Taylor) for all their hard work these past few months in providing valuable feedback and direction.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the two individuals who diligently worked throughout 2023 to assure that this launch would happen by year’s end: OHA Program Associate Bethany Stewart and our contracted Web Designer Rachael Gilg of [Gilg Works](#).

The new design utilizes a popular theme in the WordPress ecosystem, ensuring its long-term viability and security. The site itself is now hosted on WP Engine, allowing for an additional layer of stability and responsiveness. Most of the feedback regarding the old site centered on the daunting expansiveness of menus and pages, so we strived for simplicity in most design elements while still focusing on ease of discovery. Also, the site is now responsive by default, meaning that browsing its pages on either a mobile device or a tablet is a much more pleasant experience.

Our news, events and job listings are now integrated into reactive posting structures which allow for users to search posts with a variety of filters and sub-categories. We continue to encourage our membership to [email us](#) any and all opportunities and happenings they would like to share with the broader oral history community so that they can not only be featured in this new system, but mentioned in OHA e-blasts and social media posts as well.

And just because we have now officially launched the site, that does not mean we are

opposed to new ideas! We would love to [hear from you](#) regarding both design elements and potential errors/omissions. Also, once the 2024 committee assignments are set, we plan to reach out to every organization within the association to make sure they are properly represented on their pages. Finally, the visual design evolution continues as well, and our [Call for Photos](#) is still active. If you have images of oral history in action you would like to share with us for potential use on the site, please consider describing and uploading them via the form.



Please welcome Hailey Vinson, OHA's new program associate

Hailey Vinson might have been an architect. That was her first major at the University of North Carolina Charlotte. But like many young college students, she rethought her plans.

She loved coaching volleyball on the side, and her mom was a teacher, so Vinson switched her major and earned a bachelor's degree in middle grades education. She went on to teach middle school math and language arts at schools in Roanoke, Virginia, developing instructional multimedia materials for students as well as lecturing, grading, managing

discussions and group activities and all the other details of teaching middle school kids.

But the years immediately following the covid pandemic outbreak was a challenging time for teachers, and Vinson said she realized she was not the passionate teacher like her mom.

So she switched gears again and took a job as an electronic resources/serials assistant at Virginia Tech Libraries and went back to school to earn a master's degree in information science at the University of Tennessee Knoxville.

She also took her instructional and administrative skills to the Historical Society of Western Virginia in Roanoke serving as education coordinator and gift shop associate for the museum, which is located in a restored Norfolk & Western Railway passenger station and overlooks the Norfolk Southern's active tracks.

Vinson said that when she and her husband, James "JD" Rowe, were considering relocating to Texas, she saw the ad for OHA's program assistant and was intrigued. She said it seemed like an opportunity to further build on her skills in administration, technology and detail-oriented tasks like conference planning.

Vinson said that when she interviewed for the job and met "the Stephens" (or "Stevens?") and others at the OHA executive office, "they were just so nice." She left thinking: "I really want to work with these people."

The location is great for her and her husband, who has family nearby, she said. Rowe is a field technician for the PGA Tour, operating the ShotLink systems that tracks golf analytics in real time during golf tournaments throughout North and South America.

When she's not working, Vinson said she enjoys reading, going to the library, visiting friends in Boston and South Carolina, where she grew up, and crocheting stuffed animals, a craft that "really helps with stress," she said.

And she loves hanging out with JD and their dog, Charlotte, who Vinson described as a coon hound mutt mix with some beagle heritage, too. So far, she said, Charlotte seems happy with their move to Texas and likes their backyard but may not be keen on summer's heat.

Bethany Stewart, OHA's previous program associate, is still at Baylor in what she described last year as her dream job, serving as Baylor University's music librarian. But she's on tap to facilitate Vinson's transition as OHA's new program associate.

Indigenous college students' project seeks to document Lumbee tribal history

By Ahelayus Oxouzidis, Unmai M. Arokiasamy and Michele Fazio, University of North Carolina at Pembroke

Editor's Note: The following article describes a research project that was displayed at the 2023 OHA conference poster session in Baltimore. The project is a continuation of a service-learning oral history project, "Someplace Like Pembroke," led by Michele Fazio to collect the work histories of the Lumbee Tribe. Fazio co-produced the documentary film, "Voices of the Lumbee" (2014), which received the Working-Class Studies Association's Studs Terkel Award for Media and Journalism. The editor wishes to thank the students and Fazio, their faculty mentor, for sharing their work with the broader oral history community.



Unnamed Lumbee child from the photo collection of the Depression-era Farm Security Administration.

As research fellows in the REACH Program, we are working together to develop an Indigenous Oral History project. REACH (Research Engagement Action Community Humanities) is a grant-funded program at our home institution, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, supported by the Mellon Foundation to increase the participation of underrepresented students in graduate, doctoral or terminal degree programs in the humanities. Directed by Michele Fazio, a professor of English at UNCP, the program pairs undergraduate students with faculty mentors to foster meaningful professional relationships as they pursue individual research projects.

The 2023 Summer REACH Exploration Program contained several lesson modules on the study of oral history and the Federal Writers' Project to prepare students to interview Lumbee elders for an ongoing study documenting environmental changes in Robeson County, North Carolina, conducted by Ryan Emanuel (Lumbee), an associate professor at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment. The collecting of stories from the elders of the Lumbee Tribe taught our fellows cohort many things. It taught us how to listen to elders tell stories in the way that is common amongst their nation. Listening to elders teaches everyone how to respect them more because of the humbleness and vastness of their knowledge.

For the Native students in our cohort, this was simply another day in our lives, considering we all have first-hand experience in storytelling. We were able to step up as leaders in the cohort for those who are not as familiar with communicating with Native elders. We were able to teach our cohort how to be respectful and patient, along with being culturally competent towards our prized elders.

Oral history "work" is the most essential form of gathering knowledge there is. As we have learned before, after and during collecting oral histories, we know that this is not really work, but just having a conversation with another person. Considering that all of us learn from our parents and grandparents through conversation, listening is an essential way of learning along with simple observation. This is why all age groups can and should do oral history collecting.

To maximize the educational potential of the participants, we did research on oral history collecting to make sure we asked the right questions but also made it more conversational, which would then make it less formal and easy for the narrator and interviewer. All 18 members of the cohort worked on transcribing their interviews to make them all uniform and readable with the goal of creating a new archive for the Lumbee Tribe to be used for future research.

This project has two parts being done by myself and my partner, Unmai Arokiasamy. My part of the project will dive into the digital archival side with this type of work. This includes developing a method of storing information that is entirely rooted in Indigenous sovereignty and data protected. Unmai's part of the project will consist of conducting interviews of the Lumbee elders to record their oral histories. This is incredibly important work because without oral histories, there is none to archive. It is also very important because we need the voices of both, elders from 10+ years ago to elders of today; their knowledge is important to everyone. We strongly believe in the creation of an Indigenous archive for the Lumbee. Our goals are to change the ways the Lumbee people have been perceived throughout history, educate the world and bring pride to the Lumbee nation.

The implications of our research project are wide. Over the summer, the Lumbee Tribe funded an archival workshop and invited Alex Soto, director of the Labriola National American Indian Data Center at Arizona State University Library to aid us in creating our Indigenous archive. As emphasized, this archive is led by Indigenous students, and it was formed with help from accomplished Indigenous scholars.

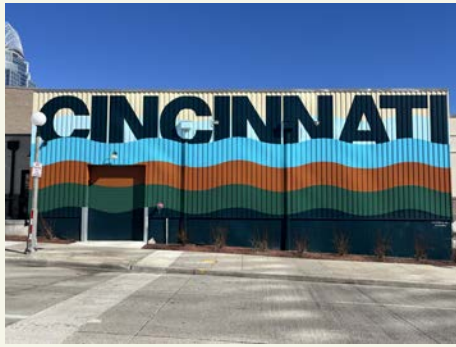
One of our projects is to create a community exhibit, which will entail taking pictures from the Library of Congress taken during the Depression-era Farm Security Administration project and presenting those photos in an exhibit so the Lumbee people can name the people in the photos. We hope to correct the record of those who were so wrongfully described as people of "mixed race" instead of being described with their names and tribal affiliation.

Participating in oral history work has been life changing. All of us in the 2023 cohort absolutely loved the work we did, and we hope that the research continues.

About the students:

Ahelayus Oxouzidis is a junior at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke majoring in psychology and minoring in both American Indian studies and business management. He is a member of the Kwakwaka'wakw, Haida and Tlingit Nations of British Columbia (Canada, and Alaska. His research is grounded in community engagement.

Unmai M. Arokiasamy is a Two-Spirit Lumbee studying American Indian studies with a minor in creative writing at the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. After taking a class on Critical Race Theory in their senior year at Appalachian State University, their life took on a new meaning. Since graduation, Unmai began to pursue a connection with their relatives, ancestors and homelands. In 2022, they began their studies at the UNCP and began to immerse themselves in history and culture through university/community engagement. Unmai has been working to understand the oral histories of Lumbee Elders for almost a year now through the R.E.A.C.H Program and has used this opportunity to create collaborative relationships with the university and tribal government oriented towards the goals of autonomy and self-determination.



OHA 2024 annual meeting update

By Troy Reeves, OHA Vice President

The 2024 annual meeting will be held in Cincinnati, Ohio, Oct. 30-Nov. 2 at the Cincinnati Netherland Plaza Hotel. The call for session proposals closes Feb. 23, but there are still a number

of ways you can get involved in the conference, including: submitting a poster proposal, volunteering to serve as a chair for a panel and volunteering to help with other aspects of the conference.

So, please check the [Annual Meeting webpage](#) on OHA's website for updates. Registration for the conference will open in May, and the preliminary program will be available in June. Questions about the upcoming meeting can be directed to Conference Committee Chair [Ellen Brooks](#) or the [OHA Office](#).

Paul Ortiz honored as Brooklyn College's Hess Scholar-in-Residence

When OHA past president and University of Florida history professor Paul Ortiz spends the week of April 1-5 at Brooklyn College as its 2023-24 Hess Scholar-in-Residence, he won't have trouble engaging with the theme "Defending the Humanities."



Ortiz has been in the trenches doing just that having served three years as president of the university's faculty union during a period of increasing attacks on books, curriculum and shrinking funds for education.

"Unions shouldn't be the last line of defense on intellectual freedom," he said. But too often, they have been, with university administrators quietly thanking union leaders for pushing back against political challenges to students' right to learn.

Political science professor Gaston Alfonso, director of the Ethyle R. Wolfe Institute for the Humanities, which sponsors Hess Week, said Ortiz was the unanimous choice for this year's scholar-in-residence, noting his faculty union work in fighting political and financial attacks on higher education.

Ortiz said he is "humbled and grateful" for the honor and has already enjoyed working with faculty and students there, beginning with a standing-room-only November program featuring a joint appearance with Barbara Smith, independent scholar, author and social justice activist who was last year's Hess scholar.

Brooklyn College, part of the City University of New York, has a largely first-generation, working-class student population. They are energized and engaged with the world, Ortiz said, and have "no sense of entitlement."

Ortiz recalled that in his own academic experiences, he took for granted that he could go to college and choose what he wanted to study. But in Florida, he said, "you just can't take that for granted."

“You can’t take basic intellectual freedom for granted,” he said. “I didn’t understand in college how fragile something like intellectual freedom is.”

Ortiz, who also directs the university’s Samuel Proctor Oral History Program, is the author of *An African American and Latinx History of the United States*, which has served as a scholarly foundation for this year’s Hess program. He also will present a lecture based on his forthcoming book *A Social Movement History of the United States*.

The Hess program is named for Robert L. Hess, who served as Brooklyn College’s president from 1979 until his death in 1992. Ortiz said that in researching Hess, he decided the man was “the kind of person I’d have loved to have served with.”

The college has long ranked high on numerous “best of” college lists and was once nicknamed “the poor man’s Harvard,” to which Hess is said to have replied: “I like to think of Harvard as the rich man’s Brooklyn College.”

Alfonso noted that the college is a commuter school where building a sense of cohesion can be a challenge. So programs like the Hess scholar-in-residence create opportunities to build community by showing students the importance of educational opportunities, both formal and informal, beyond the classroom.

The college also has a long tradition of engaging with its community through its Brooklyn-based oral history project, called the Brooklyn College Listening Project, in which students have created hundreds of recorded interviews on various themes since 2015.

Oral history will figure prominently in the Hess Week events, and Ortiz said he is interested in exploring how oral history can build stronger connections between a college and its community. In addition to the public programming, Ortiz also will be attending classroom events, sit in on an oral history seminar and offer feedback on student projects throughout the week.

The public program lineup for Hess Week includes:

- April 1, *Defending the Freedom to Learn*, a panel exploring how book bans and curriculum gag orders deny students’ freedom to learn and access to education.
- April 2, *Our History, Our Voices: Oral History to Change the World*, in which a panel inspired by Ortiz’s OHA leadership and his work as director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program will explore multiple public uses of oral history.
- April 2, *Defending the Freedom to Teach*, a panel exploring current political attacks on teachers’ freedom to teach and imagining ways forward.
- April 3, *Bearing Witness and Taking Action in an Age of Rising Fascism: Oral History in the Field and in the Classroom*, in which Ortiz will talk about his own oral history experiences.
- April 3, *Union Power! Academic Freedom and the Future of Higher Education*, a panel exploring the role of academic labor unions in defending academic freedom.
- April 4, *Blueprint for Solidarity: Black, Latinx and Asian American Freedom Struggles*, a panel exploring lessons learned.
- April 4, *Hess Memorial Lecture*, based on Ortiz’s forthcoming book, *A Social Movement History of the United States*.

All Hess Week public programs are livestreamed and archived on the [Wolfe Institute’s YouTube channel](https://libguides.brooklyn.cuny.edu/wolfe2023/hessweek). For program details and times, go to: <https://libguides.brooklyn.cuny.edu/wolfe2023/hessweek>.



Get involved: call for nominations for OHA governance roles

The OHA Nominating Committee invites you to help move the organization toward its strategic goals and focus on social justice by submitting statements of interest (if nominating

yourself) or recommendations (if nominating someone else) for the following elected leadership positions.

OHA First Vice President (1 seat) to be elected for a one-year term (2024-2025) and a four-year commitment, serving initially as first vice president, then as vice president, president and immediate past president.

OHA Council (2 seats) to be elected for a three-year term (2024-2027).

Underrepresented members are especially welcome, as described in the [OHA Statement on Diversity and Inclusivity](#).

Detailed descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of OHA officers and council members can be found [here](#).

Recommendations and statements of interest must include: name, contact information and a paragraph summarizing the individual's qualifications and vision. Candidates who are not already OHA members must join the organization following their official nomination.

The Nominating Committee will review all submissions and, with OHA Council approval, will select at least two candidates for each position to bring to the membership for election. [Submit your nominations here](#).

March 30 is the nomination deadline.

In Memoriam
Ronald J. Grele



Editor's Note: Ronald J. Grele, past president of the Oral History Association and a national and international leader in the oral history movement, died Dec. 13, 2023. He was 89. He headed Columbia University's Oral History Center for Research for nearly 20 years, among his many leading roles in the field. He is survived by his four children and their spouses and his nine grandchildren.

Below is an excerpt from a remembrance by Mary Marshall Clark, also a past OHA president and director of the Columbia Oral History Center for Research.

Ronald J. Grele, former director of the Columbia University Oral History Center for Research, former associate professor in the Columbia History Department and past president of the national Oral History Association died peacefully surrounded by family and friends in his New York City home on Dec. 13, 2023. Beloved by friends, family, students and colleagues scattered far and wide, Ron shaped the oral history movement in the United States and around the world with his intellectual rigor, passion and generosity.

Ron served as director of the Columbia Center for Oral History Research (then called the Oral History Research Office) from 1982-2000. As director, he used his expansive interdisciplinary knowledge and networks around the world to build a field made up of curious fieldworkers, brilliant academics and researchers, activists and community-based workers from Harlem to Chinatown who helped define and expand the field of oral history for generations.

As editor-in-chief of *The International Journal of Oral History* in the crucial years from 1981-1985, Ron engaged hundreds of oral historians in international conferences to write up their fieldwork and encouraged them to try their hands at developing oral history theory in

interdisciplinary ways. Current students still use the *IJOH* to inspire their own fieldwork and to devise interpretative frames.

Ron was president of the OHA from 1987-1988 and took a leadership role in defining ethical standards for the practice of oral history nationally. He traveled the world to present at oral history conferences and participated in the founding of the International Oral History Association. In 1994, Columbia held a defining international conference that, for the first time moved international conferences beyond Europe and was inclusive of African, South American and Latin American participation. Ron also helped establish the Columbia University Summer Institute in Oral History, a two-week intensive training institute that has drawn thousands of students and scholars interested in oral history for over 27 years.

Most importantly, Ron's book, *Envelopes of Sound*, inspired students that they could learn to interpret fieldwork for themselves in their own cultural contexts, which at the time was a radical thought and a thoughtful prediction of how oral history would grow.

Prior to coming to Columbia, Ron directed the Oral History Program at UCLA and served as research director at the New Jersey Historical Commission and assistant director of the Ford Foundation Oral History Project. He began his career in oral history as an interviewer and archivist at the John F. Kennedy Oral History Program, housed at the John F. Kennedy Library. He was awarded a Fulbright teaching appointment at the University of Indonesia and conducted workshops and seminars on oral history throughout Europe, Asia and Latin America.

Ron received his doctorate from Rutgers University and taught at Lafayette College, the California State University at Long Beach and Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn. He served as a consultant on a number of oral history projects with museums, historical agencies and corporations and conducted biographical interviews for the Columbia oral history center with women graduates of Columbia Law School, including Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, along with hundreds of other life histories over the years.

In his retirement, Ron volunteered to conduct interviews for a community history project documenting the social and cultural history of Harlem. He had an abiding devotion to community history and devoted years of volunteer service to the Museum of the Chinese in the Americas.

Ron will be remembered as an oral history enthusiast who inspired thousands of conversations and publications about oral history as an art as well as a discipline and who permanently established oral history education at Columbia University.



What would you like to see in the next OHA Newsletter?

OHA Newsletters are sent out five times per year. Have a suggestion for content for the newsletter? Email Mary Kay Quinlan at ohaeditor@gmail.com.

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