



## Pittsburgh OHA conference to focus on digital age

By Donna M. DeBlasio, Marjorie McLellan, Co-Chairs 2008 Program Committee  
Charles Hardy III, OHA President Elect

This year the Oral History Association will meet in Pittsburgh, Pa., Oct.15-19 at the Sheraton at Station Square. The conference theme, "A Convergence of Interests: Oral History in the Digital Age," is woven through many of the sessions, which will make for an exciting and thought-provoking meeting.

The OHA is excited to open the conference on Wednesday evening with a HistoryMakers event at the Heinz History Center. Lynn Hayes Freeland of Pittsburgh's KDKA-TV will interview one of the city's most important community activists, Sala Udin. A civil rights activist during the 1960s and 1970s, Udin was a leading voice for the poor and disenfranchised while serving as a member of Pittsburgh's city council from 1995-2005. A reception will follow the public program.

The meeting includes three plenary sessions that are both topical and timely. Thursday's plenary, "Portrait of America: Voices From the Federal Writers Project," commemorates the 75th anniversary of the inauguration of the New

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Pittsburgh skyline—courtesy of VisitPittsburgh.



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## *From the president*

# Best Wishes from Baghdad!

I am perhaps the first OHA president to serve in the position from another country, but in these days of e-mail communication, there is still a lot you can do while being stationed far away. I left the national park in Lowell, Mass., in May to take a position with the Department of State at the U.S. embassy in Iraq. I work in the public affairs section of the embassy as a cultural affairs liaison and will be posted here for a year.

My work is multifold, and I am responsible for a number of programs, including assisting Iraqi non-governmental organizations in capacity building, helping to review Fulbright Scholar applications and promoting cultural exchange between our two nations. Some of the more interesting projects I have been involved with so far include the planning for a major concert of the Iraqi National Symphony Orchestra and the creation of a historic preservation district centered on a shrine that has been sealed off to the public since 1991.

I have also not let my recorder rest since coming to Baghdad. One of the fortuitous quirks of fate was my rendezvous with the key staff of the Association of Diplomatic Studies and Training, located on the grounds of the Foreign Service Institute, where I did a country briefing before leaving for Iraq. Stu Kennedy, Ambassador Ken Brown, Les McBee, Marilyn Bentley and others run an exciting group that focuses on lots of programs, including a very active and



*OHA President Mehmed Ali, right, and colleague Hyder Jaffar inspect the condition of the Shrine of Miryam. The shrine is dedicated to a saintly woman who through her generosity took care of thousands of poor people in Iraq and was respected by Muslims, Jews and Christians. Photo courtesy of Mehmed Ali.*



*OHA President Mehmed Ali dons protective gear outside the "booches" or trailers where he and other U.S. Embassy staff in Baghdad live. The trailers are surrounded by sandbags for protection and are located behind the Palace Embassy Annex. Photo courtesy of Mehmed Ali.*

long-running oral history project. It just happens that their association is beginning a project involving interviews with members of the diplomatic corps in Iraq, and so I gladly volunteered to capture some memories and information for them. I also have been promoting oral history to many local groups here, and I believe we will soon be launching some projects with disabled veterans, survivors of the Assyrian Massacre of 1933 and traditional folklife artisans.

Although the security situation in Baghdad can sometimes be a little harrowing, I consider it an important duty to attempt to replace the "broken windows" that symbolize this country. Culture, history and the arts are bridges towards peace, and I hope the work that I do here will have a long-term impact on bringing some stability to this part of the planet. Please don't forget that our work as oral historians has positive outcomes for those involved, and we need to carry further the message that preservation, not devastation, is the best path.

While I have been in Iraq, Vice President Charlie Hardy has been leading a number of OHA projects and is doing a stellar job coordinating the upcoming conference in October. I have recently reviewed the program, and it looks like an excellent convergence of ideas will take place in Pittsburgh. I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the effort, and I will be flying back to the States hopefully to see many of our members there.

Ma'as salaama!  
Mehmed Ali

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# Voice Recognition Software: A Brief Case Study

By Kirstin Duffin, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Dragon NaturallySpeaking is voice-activated software that allows users to communicate with a computer by means of their voice rather than their keyboard. The software's aim will make anyone who failed Keyboarding 101 giddy with delight. Forgo typing, be it for a document, an e-mail or instant messaging. Dragon listens to your voice and records your composition faster than you can type. After a brief, 15-minute training and tutorial session, during which Dragon listens to the user and he or she learns commands to navigate within Dragon, you are ready to start using the program.

Applying the magic of Dragon NaturallySpeaking to the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Oral History Project, the staff wanted to determine whether a student user of Dragon, reciting a narrator's words to the computer, would be a more cost-effective means of transcribing audio interviews as compared to typing a transcript.

Starting out, the brevity of the training surprised me. After hearing myself read just a few paragraphs, I wondered how accurate Dragon would be. The user can opt for further voice recognition training with Dragon, but as my

time with testing the software was short, I bypassed this choice. I wanted to get started, commanding Dragon with such powerful keywords as "scratch that" (deletes what was just written), "new line" (acts like the return key, creating a new line), and "go to sleep" (hibernates the program—in this mode, Dragon will not register audio through the microphone). After completing the training, I felt prepared to use the program.

Despite the succinct tutorial, Dragon amazed me with its accuracy. It understood words even when I slurred my

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## Emerging crisis grant to aid study of displaced Afro-Colombians

By Charles Hardy III, OHA President Elect

The Oral History Association has awarded its 2008 Emerging Crisis Research Award to Ann Farnsworth-Alvear and Carlos Rosero of the University of Pennsylvania.

In 2006 the OHA established an Emerging Crisis Oral History Research Fund, which awards an annual grant of up to \$3,000 to enable researchers to undertake oral history research in situations of crisis in the United States and abroad. This year, the fund attracted more than a dozen proposals, many of excellent quality. Indeed, so many of the proposals were clearly fundable that the committee found the selection of the winner problematic.

After serious soul searching, the selection committee, composed of Patrick Carlton at the University of Las Vegas, Jeffrey Gerson from the University of Massachusetts at Lowell, and Debra Schultz of the International Center for Transitional Justice, gave the award to Ann Farnsworth-Alvear and Carlos Rosero of the University of Pennsylvania for a project entitled "Twice Refugees: Afro-Colombians and Political Action During the Explosion of Violence Along Colombia's Pacific Coast."

Farnsworth-Alvear and Rosero will use the award to travel to hamlets along the Yurumangui and Guapí rivers where they plan to videotape oral history interviews to improve understanding of the emerging humanitarian crisis facing black communities along Colombia's Pacific Coast. By early 2008, Colombia had more than 4 million internally displaced persons (*los desplazados*), including 1.8 million Afro-Colombians, the majority of whom come from the Pacific Coast. In this region they have been caught in struggles between the Colombian military forces, regionally-based guerilla armies and local paramilitary

units. Drug trafficking fuels the crisis, with the armed actors all having links to the Pacific Coast import-export trade in coca and small arms. These displaced persons have migrated to Buenaventura, Cali, Bogota and other cities where they have struggled to survive and to bring international visibility to the refugee crisis.

To provide depth to this humanitarian crisis, and move it beyond the focus of victimization, the investigators plan to conduct oral interviews with *desplazados* and with activists who have remained in the rural communities. These interviews will elicit their memories of political struggle before and during the recent wave of violence. The researchers also will interview persons who have been involved in attempts to establish peaceful communication and relationships with guerilla and paramilitary leaders while avoiding confrontation with the national government's armed forces.

The investigators will work with the Latin American and Latino Studies Program and the Van Pelt Library at UPenn to create a digital archive housed at the university. They also plan to publish some of the interviews in English and to place translated materials into the hands of African-American journalists interested in gaining an understanding of the emerging crisis faced by Afro-Colombians.

The Emerging Crisis Research Fund has quickly become one of the OHA's most important initiatives. Due to the high quality of submissions, the OHA will be looking for funds to increase the number of worthy projects it can assist each year. Those interested in contributing to the Emerging Crisis Fund or willing to assist in fundraising should contact the OHA. ❖

## Voice Recognition Software: A Brief Case Study

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speech, sacrificing my enunciation while trying to understand the narrator's words. Dragon knew to put words in context. For example, if I said, "They're commuting over there using their bicycle built for two," Dragon would understand when to spell they're as opposed to there or their. Also, although the words we're and were can sound alike if one were speaking quickly, Dragon could distinguish between the two.

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*Transcribing using one's voice rather than one's fingers is a new skill that takes time to master. If one can accept and expect a steeper learning curve, I believe Dragon can be used effectively.*

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The program had difficulty with proper nouns. Sometimes it wrote a more common word with a similar sound, and sometimes it guessed admirably at the spelling of the name. Command words caused confusion for Dragon within the context of the interview. Saying "edit" could bring up the edit menu, pausing the transcription; dictating "period" could instead type the punctuation mark. These ambiguities aside, Dragon's precision was impressive.

On the other hand, Dragon's "autopunctuation" feature worked less satisfactory. With autopunctuation turned on, Dragon will insert commas and periods with the natural pauses and inflections of the speaker's voice. Less common punctuation marks, such as the colon, question mark and exclamation point, must be inserted by the speaker. With autopunctuation off, the speaker must instruct Dragon where to place all punctuation, so the transcriptionist would need to remember to say "period" and "comma" in the correct places. Otherwise the transcript would be a string of text with no punctuation whatsoever.

I tested the software with autopunctuation on and learned that transcribing does break the normal flow of speech. While I dictated the oral history narra-

tor's words, I focused on what was being said in the interview rather than on my own intonations, which caused Dragon to add commas and periods in strange places. Transcribing with Dragon required me to focus on audio output rather than the interview's context, and the product was a transcript with punctuation placed sporadically.

There are some practical ways, however, that I could make Dragon work to my advantage. Turning the headphone feedback of the transcriptionist's voice off, for example, stopped my voice from covering the narrator's. The "add new command" feature was a hidden treasure. This allowed for the creation of self-formatted shortcuts.

Two such shortcuts were especially helpful. When I came to an unclear spot in the interview, I created the shortcut "sounds unclear" (I got to choose the catchphrase). Saying it would cause unclear to appear. Instead of having to say, "unclear, select unclear, bold that," this shortcut let me bypass vague dialogue with ease. To identify the start of a new speaker, I was having trouble getting Dragon to understand that I wanted it to type letters. Saying "MS," for instance, might yield "aim pass," among other combinations. I trained Dragon to understand that when I said, "MS," it should output "MS:" Without this shortcut I would have to say, "cap m, cap s, colon," an inefficient and frustrating technique.

After the initial dictation, I tested Dragon's proficiency at helping me edit the transcript. As I had limited time to work with Dragon, using it to help clean up the text did not work well. With Dragon, for example, if the sentence ended with the word orangutan, I needed to say, "Insert after orangutan, period." With a number of commas and periods to add and delete, the use of a mouse appeared to be a more efficient method.

After working with Dragon for a few hours and becoming more familiar with its operation, I grew attached to it. Using Dragon, it seemed, took more practice to overcome the learning curve as compared to typing a transcription. Once I established a rhythm, I could

not imagine typing faster. I must add two caveats. First, the transcriber can work only as quickly as he or she understand the narrator's words. After hearing the interview, the transcriptionist must generate a reiteration either through vocal output (if using Dragon) or finger movement (if typing). We communicate using the keyboard nearly every day of this modern age; at typing we are highly practiced students. Voice-activated writing is a new skill with which many, including myself, have no prior experience. If I improved as much as I did during my 20 hours with Dragon, I can imagine someone with daily practice could do well with it.

It may be easier to type over the voices in the interview, perhaps because the brain can more readily process the conversation while typing. After training and working with Dragon, however, I believe using it would save time over typing. It would take practice to learn to talk over the interview's voices, to be sure, but one can acquire that skill.

In my brief experience with Dragon, as long as I could understand the voices in the interview, I could shadow the conversation. I could repeat what was just said, following the interview in this manner for considerable stretches without pausing. I could not type faster than Dragon dictated. I did struggle, however, to understand the narrator or interviewer, detaining me at times from making steady progress. Not being able to hear the words would cause anyone, whether typing or using the Dragon software, excessive toil. With time anyone could grow quite adept at decoding mumbled utterances and understanding voices through poor audio quality.

Transcribing using one's voice rather than one's fingers is a new skill that takes time to master. If one can accept and expect a steeper learning curve, I believe Dragon can be used effectively. There may be some interplay between the use of Dragon and the keyboard when it comes to editing the transcription. Overall, student transcription using Dragon NaturallySpeaking seems a plausible way to transcribe interviews for the university's oral history program. ❖

# The Maria Rogers Oral History Program: Volunteers plus Technology = Preservation and Access

By Susan Becker, Boulder Public Library

*"I feel we have all grown and can take increasing pride in our work."*

For 32 years, the oral history program at the Boulder Public Library, now known as the Maria Rogers Oral History Program (MROHP), has been collecting oral histories about life in Boulder and Boulder County, Colo. Although the program remains a small, community-based program, for the past 10 years participants have been energized by new aspects of the program's structure and technology that have helped the oral histories find their way more and more easily into the hands of an interested public.

## The Little Library and Volunteer Director that Could

The oral history collection is archived in Boulder's Carnegie Branch Library for Local History. This relatively diminutive building, funded by Andrew Carnegie and built in 1906, houses more than 200,000 historic photographs and 800,000 documents, in addition to the more than 1,500 oral history interviews.

Boulder's oral history program began in the mid-1970s but really took off after Maria Rogers devoted 12 years to running the program as a volunteer director from 1985 to 1997. She trained volunteers to be oral historians, sent them out with tape recorders to collect the stories of Boulder County, developed a physical archiving system for the interviews at the library and dreamed of moving the program into the digital age. Maria died in 1997 just as those dreams were starting a multi-year march toward fruition. Before her death, members of her family created an endowment to fund a management position for the program so that its work could continue, and the program was renamed in Maria Roger's honor.

## Collaborative, Internet-Based Technology

In the 11 years since Maria's death, the Boulder oral history program has moved to:

- recording 40 to 100 new interviews each year in digital video format,
- making the video interviews avail-



*Susan Becker, manager of the Maria Rogers Oral History Program in Boulder, Colo., discusses a film clip from a recently archived oral history with program volunteers at one of the group's monthly oral history meetings. Photo courtesy of the Maria Rogers Oral History Program.*

- able for viewing on-site on DVD,
- developing a digital archive for the audio and transcripts of all interviews,
- developing a Web site that provides full audio and transcript access to all of the interviews
- and integrating the cataloging for all of the interviews into the Boulder Public Library's computer catalog.

What has allowed a small, community-based, minimally-staffed program to accomplish these steps forward? A combination of financial support, technical support, community collaborations and ongoing support of a cadre of dedicated and talented volunteers.

## Financial and Technical Support

*"Each of us feels that we are part of a vital, growing project, one which provides us with the latest technology and shows us how to use it."*

Although technically we have only one part-time staff member to run the program, our affiliation with a public library has meant that we have been able to draw on the considerable resources of the Boulder Public Library Foundation in obtaining grants to develop our program. Over the years, the foundation has funded camera equipment, DVD conversion equipment, the digitization of old audio interviews and the development of our digital archive and Web site.

Similarly, the library's computer services department has contributed untold staff hours, not only to the technical creation of our Web site and digital archiving database, but also to seamlessly integrating oral history cataloging into the library's online catalog. This integration means that users don't even need to know about the existence of the

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# The Maria Rogers Oral History Program

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oral history program to find interviews germane to their research interests; in the course of doing a simple library catalog search, oral histories just pop up. Catalog entries have clickable links in them that take users directly to the online audio and transcript of an interview.

In addition to catalog integration, the library posts bimonthly oral history newsletters with abstracts of all new interviews on the Web, making our interviews “Google-able.” In this way, people from all over find their way to our interviews through Web searches even if they don’t know about our library or our oral history program.

## Community Collaborations

As a small program, we have found we can multiply our output and our utility within our community by collaborating with other organizations. For example, we have worked with our city’s and county’s open space programs, the University of Colorado’s Women’s Studies Department, the Rocky Flats Cold War Museum and the National Institute of Standards and Technology. We have provided training to university student interviewers and camera equipment, videographers, transcribers and DVDs to our collaborating agencies. At times, the collaborating agencies have contributed funding to expand our ability to collect more interviews. Ultimately, we each benefit by jointly archiving the collaborative interviews.

## Volunteer Program

*“The addition of volunteers to transcribe and to archive has helped relieve the pressure on interviewers who don’t like doing the paperwork.”*

Collaborative efforts are icing on the cake of our collection, but our volunteer program is the heart of what makes our program work. Currently, we have about 30 active volunteers, some of whom have been doing oral history work with us for 10 to 20 years. Others are enthusiastic new volunteers. One of the things that we have found to be most useful in maintaining that enthusiasm is providing a variety of roles for volunteers to play.

Because not everyone likes all the jobs involved in recording and processing an oral history, our volunteers can special-

ize. They can choose to be interviewers, videographers, transcribers or archivists. Many choose one area in which to specialize. Others enjoy being “21st century Renaissance oral historians.”

We’ve developed an extensive training program for volunteers, none of whom came to us as professional oral historians. Each interviewer:

- Goes through two hours of interview training
- Has two hours of videographer training
- Watches interviews from our collection to learn more about what makes a good interview
- Practices interviewing and filming at home before going out for his or her first program interview

Transcribers are trained using our transcription manual; volunteers who help with archiving are trained through a combination of an in-house manual and hands-on experience.

All volunteers receive ongoing feedback about what they are doing well and how to improve.

## Recipe for a Meeting

*“I learn from the meetings. I feel supported by them, and I feel much less ‘alone’ in what I do because of them. They provide needed structure and a place to bring questions, worries, embarrassing mistakes and unsettling experiences.”*

If volunteers are the heart of our program, monthly volunteer meetings are the heart of what keeps the program going. The meetings provide opportunities for ongoing learning, support and intellectual involvement in the field of oral history.

Our meetings take place on a Saturday morning before the library opens. One of the ways we lure people out of bed on a Saturday morning is by providing breakfast, which also gives the meeting a relaxed and interactive atmosphere and says to volunteers, “We think you are worth it.”

I keep a wire basket on my desk into which I toss pieces of paper all month long with ideas about what to include in a meeting as these ideas come up through daily work. At the end of the month, it becomes easy to draw up an agenda from the accumulated notes.

Some regular items that recur in our meetings include:

- Volunteers’ reports about what they have done in the past month or what they are planning for the near future
- Watching and discussing interview clips of recently completed interviews that either are historically interesting, show good interviewing or filming techniques or illustrate an interviewing challenges
- Sharing information about resources: books, Web sites, workshops and so on
- Ongoing training and discussion of both practical and philosophical oral history issues.

In the end, of course, it is the satisfying nature of the work that keeps volunteers coming back to conduct more interviews. I’ll close with a few quotes from our volunteers about why they like this work:

- “I love the experience of capturing for posterity individual personal histories that contribute unique bits and pieces to the larger public history.”
- “I particularly like pushing the video envelope—filming in a bee yard in bee suits, tramping around outside and filming an historic property, filming in a dark mine.”
- “I find myself truly enjoying transcription: the attention to voice, cadence and inflection is wholly absorbing.”
- “The work is tangible, the voices are real, the people are real. And I like seeing the interviews appearing online after I’ve done my work.”

## Try us out

To explore the digital archive/web site for the Maria Rogers Oral History Program, go to [www.bplcarnegie.org/oralhistory](http://www.bplcarnegie.org/oralhistory).

To try searching for interviews from the Boulder Public Library catalog, go to [boulder.lib.co.us](http://boulder.lib.co.us) and fill in a topic of interest (mining, Buddhism, mountaineering, Cold War, to name a few possibilities) along with the words “oral history” (just to make sure you get an oral history hit) in the search box on the upper left side of the screen.

Enjoy! ❖

# The Wise of All Ages

By Angela Zusman, Oakland Chinatown Oral History Project

As an oral historian and a lifelong lover of stories, I thought I knew what makes oral history valuable. Recently, I came across a quote that made me stop and question my beliefs. “We are made wise not by the recollection of our past,” says George Bernard Shaw, “but by the responsibility for our future.” What does he mean when he says this, and how does this relate to oral history, the collection of recollections?

This quote suggests to me that oral history projects are most powerful when they involve both the collection of stories and the assimilation of their lessons – when stories of the past support the making of our future. My position as project manager of an intergenerational oral history project has given me tangible experience of this power in action.

For the past year, I have been fortunate to act as the project manager for the Oakland Chinatown Oral History Project. This is the first-ever intergenerational oral history project in Oakland’s Chinatown and is sponsored by the Oakland Asian Cultural Center as a means of preserving local stories and traditions. More than an attempt to document the stories of Oakland Chinatown, the project also aims to build a bridge between the ever-widening generations.

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*‘We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future.’*

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Our strategy was to recruit and train 10 high school students to interview 10 elders in the Oakland Chinatown community. Right off the bat, we knew that if our main interest was to collect Chinatown stories, we definitely didn’t need the intergenerational piece. Recruiting, training and scheduling high school students added a huge number of extra tasks to our project. And, although they received training, the students still didn’t have the experience or skill of professional interviewers. We ended up spending much more time on each interview while collecting fewer stories. So, what were the benefits? And how could we measure our progress in bridging the generation gap?

To gauge our success, we would clearly need to hear from both sides of the gap.

Past experience with youth has taught me how valuable their insights can be. So I added a step to the traditional oral history interview process. After a youth interviewer completed an interview with an elder, I then interviewed the youth to assess what they were gleaned from the interview process. Little did we know that these youth interviews would open the door for far greater learning and inspiration than we had expected.



*Eric and Tiffany Chen interview Dr. David Der in his office in Oakland’s Chinatown. Photo courtesy of Angela Zusman.*

By interviewing the young people, we learned many useful things. First of all, we learned what the young people remembered from their interview and which stories made the strongest impressions. We also learned about the challenges they faced during the interview and therefore what we could do to better support them and refine our interview process. The youth had the opportunity to deepen their learning by articulating what they heard and contemplating its relevance to their own lives. And the elders benefited by hearing directly from the young people what they valued about the experience.

This excerpt from one of the youth interviews demonstrates some of these benefits:

**Interviewer:** *What are the benefits of participating in this project, for you and for the community?*

**Youth participant:** *... If you forget your roots, you lose your identity. I think that doing this project just ties us back to our roots and the roots of the community as a whole, because I feel as time progresses, sometimes we lose sight of where we came from. I just think we as a people should be grounded firmly into our roots so we know where we came from and we know all the hardships everyone before us has done. I just think it makes us appreciate even more what we have right now, and what we can do today.*

In addition to their learning, the young people also expressed a new level of respect for their elders – the ones they interviewed as well as the elders in their own families. Every single young person offered their thanks at the end of their interview: thank you for sharing, thank you for paving

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# State & Regional News

## University of Florida names oral history director

Award-winning author and oral historian Paul Ortíz has been named director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at the University of Florida.

Ortíz is the program's third director, succeeding Director Emeritus Julian Pleasants, who served for 12 years, and late historian and founder, Samuel Proctor. "Outgoing Director Emeritus Julian Pleasants left the program in outstanding shape, and we are relieved that he will continue to help us in the areas of research, fundraising and publishing," said Ortíz, who is relocating to UF from Santa Cruz, Calif., with his wife, Sheila Payne.

Ortíz believes in bringing history to life. The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program is already benefiting from this through his arrangement of upcoming public programs and appearances by guest lecturers, including Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Rick Atkinson, who will visit UF in September 2008. "Furthering campus and community involvement will guide us into the future," Ortíz said.

With more than 4,000 interviews and thousands of pages of transcripts, the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program is the largest one of its kind in the South and one of the largest in the nation. Transcribed interviews are available for use by research scholars, students, journalists, genealogists and the general public.

The program recently relocated to Pugh Hall, a new, state-of-the-art facility on the UF campus. This has allowed it to expand and better preserve its collection of eyewitness accounts of the economic, social, political, religious and intellectual life of Florida and the South for future generations.

The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program also is excited to unveil its new Web site. Please visit [www.clas.ufl.edu/history/oral](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/history/oral) for information on upcoming events, publications and programs, and accessibility to video and audio clips from SPOHP's digital archive.

Ortíz welcomes the idea of joining the program's changes and advancements, saying, "I am honored to be appointed incoming director of the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program."

For questions or comments, please contact Roberta Peacock by phone at (352) 392-7168 or e-mail [rpeacock@ufl.edu](mailto:rpeacock@ufl.edu).

## Former senator focus of Maine oral history project

The Bowdoin College Library in Brunswick, Maine, has announced plans for a three-year oral history project documenting the life and career of U.S. Sen. George Mitchell. A 1954 graduate of Bowdoin, Mitchell already has donated his papers to the college.

The Waterville, Maine, native known for his integrity and ability to conduct impartial negotiations, has had a wide-ranging career in the federal government, international peace

efforts and Major League Baseball, all of which will be included in the planned oral history interviews.

For more information, see: <http://library.bowdoin.edu/arch/mitchell/oralhisthome.shtml>.

## Oral history training offered

The Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, Va., is offering a four-session course on the technology and techniques of recording oral history. The skills class is designed as a hands-on workshop and will be held Sept. 4, 11, 18 and Oct. 2.

For more information and registration forms, go to: [www.vahistorical.org](http://www.vahistorical.org).

## Indigenous communities focus of training

The Library of Congress' American Folklife Center will train members of indigenous communities to document and archive their cultural traditions in a pilot program in collaboration with the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University and the United Nations' World Intellectual Property Organization. The U.S. Copyright Office is also collaborating with the program.

The program is aimed at helping indigenous peoples protect their intellectual property interests in their recordings and in the traditions they document.

The pilot project is scheduled to begin in September when two members of a Masai community from Kenya and a staff expert from the National Museums of Kenya will travel to Washington, D.C., and, later, to Duke University, for intensive hands-on training in documentary and archival skills. The Kenyans will return home with a basic field kit of equipment and appropriate computers and software to begin their cultural heritage documentation effort.

The Library of Congress said in a press release that if the pilot program with the Masai proves successful, the collaborators may offer similar programs to communities and institutions in other nations.

## Australian oral historians invite proposals

Oct. 31 is the deadline to submit proposals for the 2009 national conference of the Oral History Association of Australia, scheduled for Sept. 17-20, 2009, in Launceston, Tasmania. The conference theme is Islands of Memory: Navigating Personal and Public History.

Conference planners encourage proposals from people with a wide range of backgrounds, such as family history, community projects, museums, heritage agencies, academic institutions, radio and television, courts and performing arts.

For more information, contact Jill Cassidy at: [Jill.Cassidy@qvmag.tas.gov.au](mailto:Jill.Cassidy@qvmag.tas.gov.au).



## 2008 Wisconsin Oral History Day: The Start of Something New

By Troy Reeves, University of Wisconsin-Madison

The 2008 Wisconsin Oral History Day started as a dream in October 2007. As the only full-time oral historian in the state university system, Troy Reeves—head of the oral history program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison—followed the leadership and long-range goals of the UW—Madison's General Library System to bring the oral history program out into the community.

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*People from throughout Wisconsin as well as participants from Iowa and Minnesota brought their interest in oral history together.*

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Over the next few months, Reeves found logistical, financial and content support from various divisions of the university, including the Eau Claire and LaCrosse campuses, as well as the Wisconsin Humanities Council, the Wisconsin Historical Society and the Center for the Study of Upper Midwestern Cultures.

People from throughout Wisconsin as well as participants from Iowa and Minnesota brought their interest in oral history together to actively participate in the morning workshop and to attend the afternoon plenary, roundtables and keynote events. These people can become part of an oral history community in not only Wisconsin but also the region. People from Illinois and

Michigan also expressed interest in attending but could not make it.

Another of the day's strengths arose from our use of the Internet as the sole advertising device. Planners tapped into their e-mail lists, as well as the local history listserv, overseen by the Wisconsin Historical Society, to effectively target graduate students, staff and faculty in applicable departments and men and women involved in history related interests throughout Wisconsin and the region who would want to be involved in the day. We sent e-mails in November to announce the idea, in February when our online program went live and in late March as a "two-week warning" e-mail. Doing this allowed us to avoid putting any of our limited funds into advertising, and it allowed us to get a strong turnout of the people we thought would attend this event.

Participants offered positive anecdotal evidence through their strong comments before, during and after the day, including comments posted to an online survey. We learned, for one thing, that the day was too long. While nearly 60 different people attended all or part of the day's activities, the attendance lagged by our last event, the keynote, sponsored by the Wisconsin Humanities Council. Future Wisconsin Oral History Days will probably morph into two shorter days or one shorter day (with perhaps a reception the previous evening) to give people the oppor-

tunity to see what they want and to offer a strong, robust showing at all of the day's activities.

We would also like to tap into other sources of possible attendees, particularly the state's teachers. Oral history has and can be a vital part of an educator's learning toolbox. With our e-mail advertising, we either did not reach or did not receive response from anyone with the state's education community. We know that this constituency will be paramount for the future success of not only Wisconsin Oral History Day but also oral history in general. We will work between now and the next event to make positive connections with whomever we can to make sure teachers know about and, more importantly, attend future days. Although men and women from the Ho Chunk Nation did attend the workshop, we also intend to make more connections with the state's many Native American tribes, as well as other Wisconsin cultural groups. It will take a village to make Wisconsin Oral History Day grow and flourish.

We chose "The Start of Something New" as the initial program subtitle. Although we dropped it from all official communication, we feel, in the event's aftermath, the phrase's resonance. We sincerely believe that the 2008 Wisconsin Oral History Day will begin a beautiful friendship between the UW—Madison Oral History Program and those interested individuals throughout the state and region. ❖



### Remember to vote!

Oral History Association members will receive mail ballots this summer for election of new OHA officers, Council members and nominating committee members. Let your voice be heard in governing the OHA.

## Pittsburgh conference to focus on digital age

continued from page 1

Deal. Chaired by Don Ritchie, author of *Electing FDR: The New Deal Campaign of 1932* (2007), its speakers include Peggy Bulger and David A. Taylor from the Library of Congress' American Folklife Center, filmmaker Andrea Kalin of Spark Media, and Stetson Kennedy, the celebrated labor and civil rights activist, who in the 1930s participated in the WPA Florida Writer's Project.

In the Friday morning plenary on "Rethinking Labor"—a fitting topic for Pittsburgh, a community long associated with working class activism and organized labor—four speakers will bring a national and international perspective to how oral history has changed how we interpret workers and work. The presenters include: John Russo and Sherry Linkon, who co-direct the Center for Working-Class Studies at Youngstown State University in Ohio; Italian scholar Alessandro Portelli, author of the award winning *The Order Has Been Carried Out* (2003) and other groundbreaking works; and Tim Strangleman of the University of Kent in the United Kingdom, who studies work through interviews and images.

The Digital and Community Showcase, our third plenary, breaks new ground for the OHA. On Saturday morning, more than 30 presenters will demonstrate a wide variety of oral history, new media and local history projects in a laptop poster session, in which conference attendees can move around the room, ask questions and interact with presenters in a relaxed and informal setting. The showcase will include demonstrations and presentations on new software, digital access and search capabilities, Web-based exhibits and

archives, the GIS mapping of migrant memories, oral history and public art, the preservation of digital transcript files and more.

The meeting is most fortunate to have two remarkable keynote speakers. At the Friday luncheon, Joe Trotter Jr., Giant Eagle Professor of History and Social Justice at Carnegie Mellon University, will address the conference on the history of African Americans in Pittsburgh since World War II, the subject of his new book, to be published by the University of Pittsburgh Press this year, and on the ambitious oral history project conducted in the research of this history. A leading scholar in the field of African-American history, Trotter's publications include *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (1985) and *The African American Urban Experience: Perspectives from the Colonial Period to the Present* and *The African American Experience*, with Earl Lewis and Tera W. Hunter (2004).

The Saturday dinner will feature keynote speaker David Isay, founder of StoryCorps and its parent company, Sound Portraits Productions. The recipient of numerous awards, including the prestigious George Foster Peabody Award, Isay will discuss the vision of oral history that has shaped the StoryCorps Project, its interviews broadcast each week on NPR stations throughout the nation, and his new book, *Listening as an Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project* (2007).

As in previous years, the half-day and full-day oral history workshops held on Wednesday are led by outstanding presenters. Combining his wit and humor with more than four decades of experience, Charles Morrissey will be leading the Introduction to Oral History workshop. John Neunschwander, the OHA's resident legal expert, will offer a half-day workshop on Oral History and the Law; Mary Palevsky and Joseph Granados will lead a workshop on the choices and challenges of oral history writing projects; and Gerald Zahavi and Susan McCormick will offer half-day workshops on the digital audio and video recording of oral history interviews.

This year, the OHA also introduces two new workshops on digital oral history production and on digital archiving. OHA vice president Michael Frisch will lead a day-long, hands-on digital production workshop in which participants actually work with digital audio and video files and put them together in multimedia formats. One of the nation's leading authorities on archival audio and audio restoration, George Blood of Safe Sound Archives will team with Doug Boyd, director of the Louie B. Nunn Oral History Center at the University of Kentucky, to lead the workshop on digital preservation.

On Saturday, award-winning teachers Glenn Whitman and Howard Levin will lead a full-day workshop on the use of oral history in schools at the new Fred Rogers Center at Vincent's College in Latrobe, Pa. Here, too, workshop participants and conference participants for a Saturday afternoon tour will receive a behind-the-scenes tour of the new Fred Rogers Oral History Center archive.

The heart of any conference, of course, is its sessions, and this year the OHA annual meeting offers a typically diverse



Pittsburgh skyline.

range of panels and roundtables, with rich offerings in labor history, digital archives, public programming, education, heritage tourism, working with volunteers and other issues of importance to oral history practitioners. Oral history interviewing and projects in other nations are represented by 20 international presenters from 10 countries.

The meeting also features the use of oral histories in documentary film, including the screening of *Banished* (California Newsreel), on the racial cleansing of American counties in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

The past year has included two significant changes for the OHA. In 2007, Oxford University Press became the new publisher of the *Oral History Review*, and in 2008 MATRIX (The Center for Humane Arts, Sciences, and Letters Online) at Michigan State University became the new Webmaster of the Oral History Association Web site and is now working on a redesign of the site that should be completed before the annual meeting. The meeting also will offer sessions on the multimedia capabilities that Oxford will be developing for the online version of the *Review* and a session on best practices for the digitization of video hosted by MATRIX, which has submitted an ambitious federal grant application to investigate best practices for digitization, on which the OHA is a partner.

This year's conference also features two new formats: working groups and book discussions, that participants must sign up for in advance. In the two working groups—one on the use of emerging technologies to present oral histories in new ways to the public and the other on teaching courses in oral history in colleges, workshops and institutes—participants will engage in discussions based upon questions and issues posted online prior to the conference.

Participants in the book discussions will have the opportunity to discuss three important, recently published works in oral history with their authors. The three books are *Asylum Denied: A Refugee's Struggle for Safety in America* (University of California Press, 2008) by Philip G. Schrag, professor of law

and director of the Center for Applied Legal Studies at Georgetown University Law Center; *Life and Death in the Delta: African American Narratives of Violence, Resilience, and Social Change* (Palgrave, 2006) by Kim Lacy Rogers, professor of history and American studies, Dickinson College; and *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory, and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome* (Palgrave, 2003) by Alessandro Portelli who teaches American literature at the University of Rome, "La Sapienza."

This year's meeting also provides wonderful opportunities to enjoy and learn more about Pittsburgh, a city with a rich history, outstanding museums, great restaurants and one of the nation's most beautiful skylines. Ranked the nation's most livable city in the 2007 *Places Rated Almanac*, Pittsburgh is celebrating its 250th anniversary in 2008. This year's Thursday evening presidential reception will be held on a paddle boat that hosts us on a one-and-a-half-hour ride on the Monongahela and Ohio rivers.

Continuing what is now an OHA tradition, local hosts will lead dine-around dinner groups to neighborhood restaurants on Friday evening. On Saturday, the OHA offers a walking tour of downtown Pittsburgh conducted by Pittsburgh History and Landmarks, a tour of Pittsburgh steel and labor history sites with a visit to the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area museum and a visit to the new Fred M. Rogers Center at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pa., with a behind-the-scenes tour of its new Oral History Project archive.

A ride on one of the South Side's two cable-powered inclines, one of which is across the street from the conference hotel, is not to be missed. Pittsburgh is also the home to outstanding museums, including the Andy Warhol Museum, the Carnegie Museum of Art, The Carnegie Natural History Museum and the Senator John Heinz History Center.

There is something for everyone at the 42nd annual meeting of the Oral History Association in Pittsburgh. Come and join us! ❖

## The Wise of All Ages

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the way, thank you for your example. Many also went on to interview their own family members.

Our interest in the young people's point of view served to increase their confidence as budding oral historians. Their ideas were instrumental to every step of our process. By seeing that their ideas mattered to us, they also assumed a greater personal responsibility for the project, seeing themselves as stewards of the stories and wisdom they had been witness to.

The young people's enthusiasm and gratitude for the project was also totally contagious. When we shared their insights with the rest of the project team, our own motivation and commitment to the project increased because here, before our very eyes, we could see the project's goals manifesting.

I feel extremely fortunate to bear witness and contribute to oral histories. I'm grateful to all the people who gave their hearts to this project, allowing me to see the world from their perspective and deepen my appreciation for the wise of all ages. ❖

### Editor's Note

ANGELA ZUSMAN is an oral and personal historian and newspaper columnist. In addition to acting as project manager for the OCOHP, she is the owner of Uniquely Perfect and teaches workshops on the value of recording life stories. She is currently writing a guidebook for intergenerational oral history projects. For more information, please visit her Website at [www.uniquelyperfect.com](http://www.uniquelyperfect.com) or contact her at [info@uniquelyperfect.com](mailto:info@uniquelyperfect.com).

For more information about the Oakland Chinatown Oral History Project, please see our Web page on the Oakland Asian Cultural Center Web site at <http://www.oacc.cc/programs/ocohp.html>.

## News & Notes ...

Documenting the experiences of newspaper delivery boys and girls from 1920 to 1970 was the focus of a pilot program at the Museum of History and Industry in Seattle, which is leading to an effort to establish a repository for "paper-boys" stories and photographs.

Past carriers are invited to contribute to the oral history effort through participating senior citizen centers, historical societies and newspaper companies. For more information, contact Sandra Walker at: [papercarrier@verizon.net](mailto:papercarrier@verizon.net) or 425-265-0718.

An oral history project in South Australia that focuses on documenting changes in a large wetlands region to aid natu-

ral resources management plans to link interviewees' references to specific places with aerial maps, according to "Word of Mouth," the newsletter of the South Australian branch of the Oral History Association of Australia.

The computer mapping will allow users to click on specific locations mentioned in interviews and get summaries of what interviewees said about them. An interviewee, for example, might say he used to go fishing as a youth in a particular location and catch certain species of fish.

Planners hope it will be a quick way for users to find what local information has been collected about a particular place as well as generating a list of people who might have additional information or interest in natural resource management issues.

The American Institute of Physics is raising an endowment to fund its ongoing effort to record oral histories from prominent industrial physicists, Science magazine has reported.

The endowment will honor the work of retired executive director Marc Brodsky, whose brother Julian was a co-founder of the Comcast cable television company. Comcast learned first-hand the importance of oral history when a fire destroyed the company's archives in 1991, leading Comcast officials to begin interviews with dozens of the firm's longtime employees. The American Institute of Physics has been conducting oral history interviews since 2002. ❖

The Oral History Association Newsletter (ISSN: 0474-3253) is published three times yearly by the Oral History Association for its members. Copy deadlines are: March 1, July 1 and Nov. 1.

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For membership, change of address, subscription and delivery inquiries, call: Oxford University Press  
800-852-7323

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Oral History Association  
NEWSLETTER  
P.O. Box 1773  
Carlisle, PA 17013

Nonprofit  
U.S. Postage  
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