

# Oral History Section Newsletter

Issue 3

December 2005

## From the Chair:

By all accounts the 2005 SAA Annual Meeting was a success, with repository tours, special events, a fascinating evening at the Audubon Aquarium of the Americas, and a fun blast from the past at the Rock'n'Bowl. And let's not forget all that wonderful New Orleans food (so many restaurants, so little time)!

For me personally (and perhaps others), the pleasure of discovering this historic city and its charms was so fresh in my mind that it made the news of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita that much more tragic. There we all were, newly enamored of this unique place: we had just learned more about the region's amazing cultural and historical resources, met locals, eaten the specialties, seen the sights, and within days of our departure, all of these were threatened or destroyed. It's still unthinkable. I know I speak for our entire archives community when I say that our thoughts and prayers are with everyone on the Gulf Coast during this period of recovery.

The program for the 2005 Oral History Section meeting at the SAA Annual Meeting in New Orleans was outstanding. Chair Pam Hackbart-Dean ran the business portion of the meeting and then turned the program over to Morna Gerrard from the Georgia State University's Georgia Women's Movement Oral History Project. She spoke about the content of the collection, played clips from interviews, and talked about her work to coordinate a successful event hosted by the Archives to honor participants in the project. A second speaker, Mark Shelstad of the University of Wyoming and Tim Hawkins from Naropa University, discussed technical aspects of creating digital audio files of analog recordings.

Elections were also held and steering committee members are as follows: Eileen Simon, Chair (2005-2006); Deborah Whalen Vice-Chair/Chair-Elect; Pam Hackbart-Dean, Past Section Chair & Nominating Committee Chair; Lauren Kata (2004-2006); Geoffrey Reynolds (2005-2007);

Rebecca Hankins (2005-2007). Please contact any of us with questions or concerns about this section or oral history in general! I'd especially like to thank Deborah Whalen for maintaining our section web site and Rebecca Hankins for editing our newsletter.

This year I look forward to posting past issues of our section newsletters on the web. Teresa Brinati, SAA's Director of Publishing, and Christel Maass, who works with the SAA Archives at the University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee, were instrumental in helping me obtain several back issues. Keep an eye out for them on the Oral History Section website (<http://www.archivists.org/saagroups/oralhistory/index.asp>) in coming months.

## Oral History Collections

### **National Hansen's Disease Museum Hurricane Stories: Katrina and Rita**

The National Hansen's Disease Museum, in the Carville Historic District, Carville, Louisiana has a new oral history collection of interviews related to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The collection contains 63 oral histories collected in September and October 2005 by Elizabeth Schexnyder, Curator of the National Hansen's Disease Museum & the 102<sup>nd</sup> Military History Detachment. Interviewees include the National Guard, Search and Rescue, Public Health Service, FEMA, Animal Rescue, Nurses, Doctors, TV News, and an Evacuation Bus Driver. Accompanying photographs on exhibit were taken by Elizabeth Schexnyder and Steven Singerman. For additional information contact the Museum at 225-642-1950; Mail: 1770 Physicians Park Drive, Baton Rouge, LA 70816; Museum location: 5445 Point Clair Road, Bldg. 12, Carville, LA.

## **Emerson College American Comedy Archives**

The American Comedy Archives was established at Emerson College in 2005 to acquire, preserve and make available primary source material that documents the professional activities of the ground breaking individuals who have written, produced or performed comedy for radio, television, motion pictures or live performance. It is the first academic collection of its kind devoted to exploring the nature of comedy as an American art form and reflects the College's view that examining the history, sociology, and culture of comedy represents an important and underrepresented field of study.

The project is the brainchild of Bill Dana, a 1950 Emerson graduate with a distinguished career in comedy as a performer, writer and producer. Dana and Project Archivist Jenni Matz have arranged interviews with a veritable "who's who" of comedic history. To date over three dozen interviews have been conducted with such luminaries as Phyllis Diller, Dick Gregory, and Jonathan Winters. You can read excerpts and view the full list of interviews on the following website:

[http://www.emerson.edu/comedy/index.cfm?doc\\_id=1795](http://www.emerson.edu/comedy/index.cfm?doc_id=1795).

## **Oral History Exhibits**

### **World War II Exhibit North Dakota Heritage Center**

Bismarck- The experiences of North Dakota soldiers during World War II will be told, in their own voices, as part of a new exhibit opening to the public Saturday, November 5, at the North Dakota Heritage Center in Bismarck.

The opening is taking place as part of the 17th Annual Governor's Conference on North Dakota History, November 4-5. The theme of the conference is "North Dakota and World War II," marking the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war's end.

Produced by the State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND), North Dakota Remembers World War II will feature individual recollections of

North Dakotans that are preserved on video and audio tapes collected as part of the state's Veterans History Project. Some of these are presented in an hour-long DVD that will be part of the exhibit. The



stories of other participants will be told through their quotes, mixed with personal photographs, historic images and maps, as well as uniforms, medals, and military equipment and memorabilia.

The exhibit begins with the December 7, 1941 events at Pearl Harbor that brought the United States into the war, and continues through the demobilization at war's end in 1945.

The exhibit grew out of the North Dakota Veterans History Project, which has used volunteers from across the state to interview wartime veterans since July 2003. To view the data, visit [www.loc.gov/vets](http://www.loc.gov/vets) and click on "Search the Veterans Database," using either the veteran's name or searching by state.

The exhibit will provide visitors with the chance to hear how some of the 58,000 North Dakotans who served in the war did what they "had to do."

For additional information on this exhibit and the project, please contact: Larry Wegleitner or Gerald Newborg (701) 328-3533 or 328-2668.

## **Oral History Projects**

### **Calumet Region Oral History Project Chicago Historical Society**

The Calumet Region Oral History Project involves former employees, and their spouses, who worked in the Chicago/Indiana steel industry located on the south-east side. There are about 25 participants and, so far, they are all from SOAR, the retired workers union. The project has just begun conducting interviews; once completed and processed, the interviews will be housed at the

Chicago Historical Society. The scope of the project is roughly from 1950-present and focuses on the decline of the steel industry in Chicago, and its impact on the people working in it. The participants worked at such places as Republic, Wisconsin, Inland, and Acme Steel. Ultimately, the goal is that the interviews will build upon the current sources available to researchers because currently the sources end at around the 1970's. In this way, the project aims to continue the story of the steel industry in Chicago and to document the experiences during the decline of the industry, which, right now, little is known.

For additional information please contact: Nathan Whittom, [nathan.whittom@gmail.com](mailto:nathan.whittom@gmail.com).

## **American Numismatic Society Launches Oral History Program**

In late spring of 2005 the (ANS) began its first oral history project—the only known oral history project being conducted with professional numismatists. Based in Manhattan, the ANS is the largest museum in the Western Hemisphere dedicated to the study of coins and currency. The staff of the ANS Archives initiated the project in anticipation of the ANS's 2005 sesqui-centennial celebration. The archives itself was only established last year, also in anticipation of the 2005 anniversary.

To date, staff have conducted more than thirty-five hours of interviews with fourteen individuals. These individuals consist of former staff and board members of the ANS. Four additional interviews have been scheduled for the last quarter of 2005, with another four anticipated in 2006. All interviews have been audiotaped and are currently being transcribed and edited.

To learn more about the history of the ANS and its archival program, please visit: <http://www.amnumsoc.org/archives/> or contact Joseph M. Ciccone, J.D., C.A, [cicconej2@yahoo.com](mailto:cicconej2@yahoo.com).

## **The Cable Center Oral and Video History Program**

The Cable Center's Oral and Video History Program continues a project begun in 1985 that tells the story of how cable television evolved from a small

mom-and-pop business to a worldwide powerhouse of an industry. Italian historian Alessandro Portelli said, "Oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing and what they now think they did." By gathering these kinds of recollections from pioneers in the industry as well as those who continue to move the business forward, we gain a "big picture" historical document on an industry that impacts almost everyone in the world today.

Through perspectives from people who played key roles in creating and growing the cable television industry, we learn a great deal not only about innovative business strategies, but also people's hopes for the growth and betterment of their communities. The Oral and Video History archive now contains over 260 individual audio and video histories and five panel discussions. These accounts explore the development of the industry from many different aspects, from the engineering and technological challenges in the 1950s to the programming innovations of the 1980s and '90s. The interviews are transcribed, digitized, catalogued and posted on the website for use by researchers, students, academicians and all who are interested in the telecommunications and broadband fields. Excerpts from the oral histories also appear in The Cable Center's on-site exhibitry and video productions, and have been used in academic presentations.

In addition to building one of the most extensive industry-related archives in existence, The Cable Center is working to provide sophisticated access platforms to this collection through its website. Almost 100% of the archive's written transcripts and over 50% of the videos are accessible through the internet with more being processed everyday. In addition, the entire collection is being catalogued through OCLC. Other information and links provide more in-depth study on the subject matter for the many researchers, authors and students that access the site.

To learn more about this program, or to view the collection please visit <http://www.cablecenter.org/education/library/oralHistories.cfm> or contact Kristin Van Ormer, Oral and Video History Program Manager, at [kvanormer@cablecenter.org](mailto:kvanormer@cablecenter.org).

## **The American Folklife Center/Library of Congress Oral History Project for Hurricane Survivors**

The American Folklife Center of the Library of Congress is working with folklorists at the University of Houston and in Austin, Texas, to create an oral history project that will put academic survivors of the hurricane to work collecting survivor stories in Texas. The Library is training historians and other academics in conducting oral histories, and will donate tape recording equipment for this project.

In addition, the Library will assist in the development of a database and recording archive so that this collection of oral histories will be usable by historians, journalists and other researchers.

The American Folklife Center is also working with folklorists in Baton Rouge and Shreveport on a similar project for hurricane survivors in those areas.

Once the New Orleans City Archives is restored, the Folklife Center has agreed to conduct a similar partnership project in New Orleans and will create a portal database that will house the oral histories collected in all three areas (Texas, central/north Louisiana and New Orleans).

Excerpt reprinted with permission from The Library of Congress Gazette, 10.14.2005. Contact Michael Taft ([mtaf@loc.gov](mailto:mtaf@loc.gov)) at the American Folklife Center with questions.

## **North Dakota Veterans History Project Interviews Needed**

North Dakota veterans living in the Sargent County and Oakes areas are needed to be interviewed for the North Dakota Veterans History Project. The project is designed to interview veterans of all wars involving the United States, from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

The project will be assisted in the Sargent County area by Susan Kudelka and the Sargent County Museum in Forman. The interviews will be conducted at the Sargent County Museum Thursday, August 11 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and in the Oakes area Friday, August 12.

Veterans interested in recording their story should contact North Dakota Veterans History Project staff by calling (701) 328-3533 or email at [vethist@state.nd.us](mailto:vethist@state.nd.us).

## **Wright State University Oral History Project**

Wright State University Libraries' Special Collections and Archives has initiated a new oral history project to capture the voices behind the technological dimensions of the Cold War. Thanks to a planning grant from the Legacy Resource Management Program of the U.S. Department of Defense, this project will document through oral history the knowledge and experiences of individuals who researched and developed Cold War Aerospace Technology between 1946 and 1991. The initial focus will be on technology emerging from nearby Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, a site at the forefront of this development. This oral history project, along with its resulting research materials, will serve as the basis for a Cold War Aerospace Technology archive at Wright State University, which will compliment and expand its already existing aviation and aerospace history collections. The Cold War Aerospace Technology archive is a collaborative project between Wright State University and Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. For further information, please contact Lynda Kachurek, Oral Historian/Archivist, Special Collections and Archives, Wright State University Libraries, 3640 Colonel Glenn Hwy., Dayton, OH 45435-0001 or by email at [lynda.kachurek@wright.edu](mailto:lynda.kachurek@wright.edu)

## **Oral History Publications**

### **Baker-Cederberg Museum and Archives Rochester, NY**

The Baker-Cederberg Museum and Archives is pleased to announce the publication of *Echoes II* that will contain summaries of BCMA's oral history interviews from 1998 through 2004. Online summaries of all of BCMA's oral histories will be



available after the New Year at  
[www.viahealth.org/body\\_rochester.cfm?id=331](http://www.viahealth.org/body_rochester.cfm?id=331).

Baker-Cederberg's oral history program began in 1984 under the direction of Dr. Paul Weld. The collection focuses on the medical staff, support staff and administrators of Rochester General Hospital as well as graduates of Rochester General's School of Nursing and currently numbers 125 interviews.

If you would like further information regarding BCMA's oral history collections, as well as its sister collection for The Genesee Hospital and Genesee Hospital School of Nursing, please contact Kathleen Emerson Britton at (585) 922-3521 or [kathleen.britton@viahealth.org](mailto:kathleen.britton@viahealth.org).

## **Oral History Appointments**

**Kathleen McCormick** was appointed Reference Archivist and Coordinator for the Oral History Program at UNC-Charlotte's J. Murrey Atkins Library on July 1, 2005. Congratulations Katie!

## **Society of American Archivists Oral History Section Steering Committee 2005-2006**

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### **Section Chair**

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