

SOUND BITES from TOHA Board of Directors

Fall/Winter 2005

Texas Oral History Association One Bear Place #97271 Waco TX 76798-7271



TOHA Board of Directors 2005-2006

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Katrina & Rita: Oral Historians Respond

Al Stein, oral historian at the New Orleans Public Library, made the last flight out to Chicago just before the city's airport closed. The oral history collection in the basement of the downtown library seemed doomed. As it turned out, the building and the collection escaped the winds and flood but the staff did not. Ninety percent of the NOPL staff, including Stein, lost their jobs in the aftermath of Katrina.

In Hattiesburg, when Katrina hit, Stephen Sloan was involved in a University of Southern Mississippi Center for Oral History project documenting Hurricane Camille, which hit the Gulf Coast in 1969. The destruction by Katrina of entire towns, such as Waveland, and economic and social communities, such as the Vietnamese shrimpers in Biloxi, raised fears among Mississippi historians that their collective memories would be lost or compromised as people dispersed across the nation.

Jennifer Abraham of Baton Rouge reported that requests for workshops on how to interview evacuees and recovery workers swamped Louisiana State University immediately after the storm. Issues arose that demanded quick response: rapport-building between people of diverse and complex cultures, dealing with personal grief and loss of community identity, covering the mutual impact of evacuees and the places that took them in, and creating primary documents with long-lasting significance.

These and other experiences surfaced in Providence, Rhode Island, at a session on Saturday morning, November 5, during the annual OHA meeting. The session was titled "Working at the Intersection of Grief and History: Oral History and Recording Tragedy." **Gene Preuss**, of the University of Houston-Downtown, voiced questions prominent in oral historians' minds in the wake of the hurricanes: When do you begin? When is a story history and not current event? How do historians deal with emotional issues? When is oral history intrusive and when is it helpful?

Mary Marshall Clark stated that a lesson learned by the Columbia University Oral History Research Office in its work with the September 11, 2001 project was that the basic standards of the Oral History Association served well in crisis. The *Providence Sunday Journal* (November 6, 2005) reported Clark's advice: "As long as interviewers are trained, follow rules laid out by professional oral historians, and show respect for the subjects, conducting interviews for history can be done soon after a disaster hits." Clark argued that the immediate intrusion of
(story continued on page 4)

From your TOHA president . . .



Got Ideas?

Members of the Board of Directors of the Texas Oral History Association are looking for your ideas. During the next three months, the directors will be collecting ideas, suggestions, and even observations that can be formulated into a **five-year plan** for the association.

Before putting any plan in place, the Board members want to receive input from the membership that can be used to shape the focus of TOHA for the next years. All comments are welcome.

The Board will be meeting in early March to exchange information and begin drafting a plan, so all TOHA members are asked to send their thoughts as soon as possible to ensure everyone's comments are reviewed.

Listed below are the e-mail addresses of the board members. Choose one or all – but please let us know what you are thinking.

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Mark your Calendars: TOHA Annual Meeting, March 2, 2006

Once again, the Texas Oral History Association will be hosting a session during the annual Texas State Historical Association meeting, March 2-4, 2006, in Austin.

The 2006 TOHA session, a *Program Devoted Entirely to Texas Women*, will feature three presenters who will share information about the contributions from women of Texas ranging from music and the arts to space exploration.

Published author and noted speaker **Susie Kelly Flatau** will start the session by *Honoring Texas Women: Their Work, Their Worth*. She will be sharing the words from many whose talents and skills are reflected in their professions as businesswomen, politicians, artists, homemakers, doctors, educators, ministers, writers, scientists, lawmakers, entrepreneurs, and so much more.

Also on the program is **Jennifer Ross-Nazzal** who will provide an insight to the women who beginning in 1978 started a new era in the field of U.S. space exploration – female space travelers. She will offer excerpts from oral histories and interviews from these modern-day pioneers who moved to Texas to be in the astronaut program. The audience will hear first-hand accounts of the challenges encountered and the goals accomplished by the first women who dared to venture beyond the earth's boundaries.

Closing the session is writer, scholar, teacher, producer, and trainer **Kathleen Hudson**. From the Dixie Chicks to Marcia Ball to Jewell Brown, women have made a serious impact on the history of Texas music and, based on her collection of interviews, Hudson's presentation will be an overview of the role women have played in the music scene.

For more than twenty years, TOHA has been part of the TSHA annual meeting. Although a specific date and time for the TOHA program has yet to be set, the session will be held during the three-day conference scheduled March 2-4 at the Renaissance Austin Hotel, 9721 Arboretum Boulevard, Austin, Texas.

TOHA encourages all members to make plans to attend and support this ongoing effort between these two organizations, and especially support the session designed specifically to highlight oral history efforts in the State of Texas.

See you there! **Rebecca Wright**



Keeping in Touch: Member News

MICHAEL WIDENER, head of Special Collections at Tarlton Law Library, University of Texas at Austin, announces two online oral history guides now available from the library: **Texas Legal History: A Survey of Oral History Resources** provides links to the many archives, museums, and law-related organizations in Texas that collect oral histories with lawyers, judges, legislators, and legal educators who have shaped Texas law and includes a section devoted to oral history publications, directories, and guides. Go to <http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/rare/law-relatedOH.html>. **Tarlton Law Library Oral History Collections** describes the library's interview collection and explains how users may access the interviews or purchase copies. The collection includes interviews with outstanding faculty and alumni of the UT School of Law, such as Joe Jamail, Dean Page Keeton, Texas Supreme Court Justice Joe Greenhill Sr., and many more. Go to <http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/rare/oralhistory.html>.

JASON THERIOT announces publication of the third volume in his book series, *To Honor Our Veterans*. Based upon oral history interviews with World War II veterans from the Cajun country of southern Louisiana, this volume is titled *The European Theater*. Theriot writes, "Whether strafing locomotives or blowing up bridges, fighting from foxholes or in the snow, treating the wounded or leading men into combat, the Cajun veterans featured in this book contributed to nearly every phase of the European Theater of Operations."

Peggy Moody and her colleagues at **STORY CIRCLE NETWORK** invite you to "Stories from the Heart III," the Third National Women's Memoir Conference, to be held February 3-5, 2006, at the Red Lion Inn, Austin. Through writing, reading, listening, and sharing, attendees will discover how personal narrative is a healing art, how we can gather our memories, how we can tell our stories. For details, visit <http://www.storycircle.org/Conference>.

The **CONSERVATION HISTORY ASSOCIATION OF TEXAS**, an archive of interviews with Texas environmentalists, has begun transferring its video and audio recordings, database, and still-image files to uncompressed, open-source digital formats on duplicate sets of hard drives. Their goal is to achieve both the near-term security of backups and the long-term ability to replicate materials to new formats as technology continues to evolve. David Todd offers to consult with other oral history groups considering the leap to digitization. For information, call David at 512-416-0100 or see <http://www.texaslegacy.org/bb/repository/CHAT-plan-complete.pdf>.

JO ANN STILES and Ellen Rienstra are working on a research project for the Stark Foundation in Orange to document through oral history the history of the city and the Stark, Lutcher, and Brown families.

VICTORIA COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION Oral History Project, chaired by Barbara Parsons Smith, is an on-going program seeking to capture the oral narratives of the diverse ethnic cultures in Victoria County with a primary focus on narratives of family customs and traditions. The Victoria Regional History Center at the University of Houston-Victoria College Library, which serves along with the Victoria County Archives as a depository for the project tapes and transcripts, reports a marked increase in the number of researchers who are interested in the social and cultural history of its region. Since fall 2001, VCHCOHP has completed forty-one interviews, with ten more on schedule. Parson serves as the VCHCOHP interviewer and believes that her training in the use of the tape recorder and the production of quality oral histories has assured the creation of source material that is authentic, useful, and reliable. As money becomes available, selected interviews are transcribed for the two repositories. Other than transcribing costs, the project is carried out entirely by volunteers.

From Kristine Navarro, director of the **UTEP INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY**, comes news about *Envisioning Bracero History*, a collaborative conference of the University of Texas at El Paso's history department and the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History, held in El Paso, November 10-12. Part of the Smithsonian's ongoing effort to collect, preserve, and share the history of the bracero program, the conference brought together scholars from both sides of the border to explore the rich cultural history and the myriad narratives of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands. The conference concluded with a panel featuring oral and public historians discussing practitioners' perspectives on collecting braceros' oral histories. The conference was followed by a collection day in which Smithsonian representatives and UTEP graduate students gathered oral histories with former braceros and their family members.

It's Your Turn!

Send your stories to TOHA, One Baylor Place #97271, Waco TX 76798-7271, or e-mail lois_myers@baylor.edu.

(Katrina and Rita, continued from page 1)

mass media into a crisis situation creates impressions on eyewitnesses that may change or distort their memories of the event. The Columbia 9/11 project collected more than 700 interviews with people who were in Manhattan on the day of the tragedy. The researchers plan to conduct follow-up interviews with the same people several years from now to document the changes caused by the event over time. Concerning the psychological aspects of interviewing people about disaster, Clark observed that oral history interviewing can be “grief work” that is helpful to people. Oral history serves more than the needs of mass media, which can often be commercial or political, by seeking to preserve the individual’s story for a time when a greater understanding of the event’s context and historical impact has been reached through careful analysis of many resources.

In addition to academics and scholars, social activists are giving attention to interviewing evacuees and recovery workers. Poor people and black people pushed out of New Orleans by the storm into strange cities in scattered states find themselves at a loss to know what the future will bring. For many at the OHA session, the situation is a human-rights matter and an opportunity to address issues of racism and poverty in the U.S.

The response of oral history to the urgent needs of people in crisis and the cause of documenting their stories exhibits the bifocal tensions of our craft: long-term, archival preservation projects that document eyewitness accounts to history and the impact of events over time vs. immediate collection and distribution of personal experience in order to raise consciousness and change social/economic policies to effect change for the better in people’s lives.

Responding to Katrina and Rita: Learn more . . .

Below are descriptions of just some of the various groups who are collecting memories of Katrina and Rita. If you have experience with interview projects of this nature, please send TOHA reports of your work.

Story Circle Network’s Catastrophe, Survival, and Recovery: Stories from the Storms

Invites evacuees and volunteers as well as people who witnessed the hurricanes and recovery efforts through national media to write and share their stories via this Web page at <http://www.storycircle.org/katrina>. Includes links to stories already sent in by women in Texas and Louisiana and other states and provides suggested ways to use writing for healing.

Alive in Truth

This project—described as citizen-to-citizen oral history—began outside the Austin Convention Center on September 4, 2005, among grassroots volunteers touched by the 6,000 displaced New Orleans residents sheltered there. Its mission includes offering “a heart-to-heart connection” through listening to the stories of displaced people, creating “a web of connection” between evacuees and their new communities, and working “to record, archive, and share stories of New Orleanian survival with the larger world.” On their Web page, <http://www.aliveintruth.org>, the group offers both “Tips for Taking Care of Yourself When Talking with Trauma Survivors” and “Tips for Taking Care of Trauma Survivors when Interviewing Them.”

Louisiana Folklife Center, In the Wake of the Hurricanes

Subtitled “A Coalition Effort to Collect Our Stories and Rebuild Our Culture,” this effort offers to serve as a network and to provide a framework for independent projects doing oral history work on Katrina and Rita. The Center is committed to training interviewers, providing a central database for interviews, and distributing forms to download and use, including legal forms and question sets. The Center has designated archives around the country which will accept interviews and other documentation, and copies will be archived in the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. From the Web site, <http://www.louisianafolklife.org/katrina.html>, researchers can view a list of coalition research projects, access topics and question banks for interviewing both survivors and responders, and download a host of useful forms.

Neighborhood Story Project

Before Katrina, students at John McDonogh Senior High School in New Orleans participated in a community documentary program in which they wrote books about their neighborhoods based on creative nonfiction writing, photography, and interviews. In June 2005, the students celebrated with block parties the publication of five books on their neighborhoods. Katrina has created a tremendous need for the school to revise its work and begin organizing
(story continued on page 5)

Learn more . . . (continued from page 4)

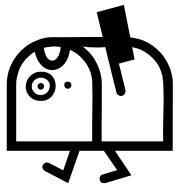
ing an oral history project about the storm and its aftermath. The project, which is allied with the University of New Orleans and the Literacy Alliance of Greater New Orleans, is seeking financial donations. To learn more, visit <http://www.neighborhoodstoryproject.org/katrina.html>.

National Economic and Social Rights Initiative

NESRI is coordinating the Hurricane Katrina Human Rights Documentation Project on behalf of the U.S. Human Rights Network. The project seeks to “gather stories and testimonies to produce briefs, reports, media, and other educational materials to support relief services, community organizing and human rights advocacy efforts related to the crisis.” Learn more about this project and how to participate by contacting Sharda Sekaran at NESRI, 212-253-1771 or sharda@nesri.org. Web site: http://www.nesri.org/nesri_program/katrina%20project.htm

Jewish Women’s Archive and Institute for Southern Jewish Life

Many displaced Jews from the Gulf Coast felt that they had experienced “a new Diaspora” with the loss of their communities in the storms. This project focuses on collecting stories from the Jews of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast to “recreate a sense of place and home.” In addition to recording their experiences of Katrina, evacuation, and resettlement, the project seeks to capture, too, the ways the experiences of Jewish southerners “diverge, intersect, and overlap with the experiences of others from the area across ethnic, racial, and class identities.” More information is available from the Jewish Women’s Archive, <http://www.jwa.org> or from Jayne K. Guberman, Director of Oral History, Jewish Women’s Archive, 617-383-6758.



Coming soon:

Sound Historian Volume 9

Featuring articles . . .

“Tom Charlton Recalls the Founding of the Texas Oral History Association,” by Gerald D. Saxon

“The Significance of the Texas Frontier in Shaping the Visual Arts,” by Holle Humphries

“Dick Cheney and Don Rumsfeld: the Ultimate Keynesian Liberals,” by Harry P. Jeffrey

book reviews . . .

To Honor Our Veterans: an Oral History of World War II Veterans from the Bayou Country, the Mediterranean Campaign by Jason P. Theriot. Reviewed by Fred H. Allison

The Oral History Manual by Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan. Reviewed by Dan K. Utley

Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora: Life Histories of Women Workers in Tijuana by Norma Iglesias Prieto.

Reviewed by Jaclyn L. Jeffrey

Tips for Collecting Stories: a Guide to Developing an Oral History by Robert B. Gentry. Reviewed by Michelle M. Mears

Rock Beneath the Sand: Country Churches in Texas by Lois E. Myers and Rebecca Sharpless. Reviewed by Wes J. Sheffield

Where I Come From, as Told to Bryan Woolley by Bryan Woolley. Reviewed by Ken Untiedt

Duke McCall: An Oral History with A. Ronald Tonks. Reviewed by William L. Pitts

and

Indexes to *Sound Historian*, Volumes 1 – 8, by Lois Myers



Opportunities coming your way. . .

March 2, 2006 – TOHA Annual Meeting – Austin

“A Program Devoted Entirely to Texas Women”

Chaired by **Rebecca Wright**, this session highlights oral history projects that reveal the important and diverse roles of women in Texas life and culture. Watch for specific time and place and registration information in your mailbox in January 2006.

March 23-25, 2006 – U.S. Latino & Latina WWII Oral History Project Symposium – Austin

“Place, Space, and Race: World War II and Latina/o Cultural Citizenship”

The legacy of WWII in Mexican American and broader Latina/o history only recently has begun to receive consistent scholarly attention. The U. S. Latino & Latina Oral History Project has compiled more than 1,000 hours of interviews with over 500 people, as well as an extensive archive of photographs, diaries, and manuscripts. This event explores how experiences at home and abroad fostered multiple revisions of Latina/o cultural citizenship during and immediately after WWII. For more information, contact project director Maggie Rivas-Rodriguez, (512) 471-0405 or mrivas@mail.utexas.edu.

Learn more at <http://www.utexas.edu/projects/latinoarchives>.

April 28-29, 2006 – Texas History Day – University of Texas, Austin

TOHA is seeking judges for its oral history award for junior and senior high school students entering the state contest associated with National History Day.

To volunteer, contact Lois Myers, 254-710-6285 or lois_myers@baylor.edu.

July 12-16, 2006 – International Oral History Conference – Sydney, Australia

“Dancing with Memory: Oral History & Its Audiences”

Oral historians from around the world will gather “down under” to share their ideas and experiences in applying oral history in museums, films, heritage studies, land rights claims, political movements, archives, academic studies, performances, community projects, and much more.

For details, visit <http://www.une.edu/ioha2006>.

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edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham

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Learn more at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~aanb>.