THE PAST MEETS THE PRESENT

Essays on Oral History

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FOREWORD

As we read this volume and consider its approaches to oral history, we should remember that in the beginning was "the word." Oral epics which were later written down provide our earliest glimpse of literary expression through examples such as *Beowulf*, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and the Pentateuch. This "inexhaustible voice" will surely be heard, as Faulkner predicted, when that "last ding dong of doom has clanged and faded." It precedes and will outlive the written word as the deepest and most permanent expression of the human heart.

As an outsider, that is, one who was not present at the symposium which produced these essays, it is fascinating to read the varied approaches the speakers bring to their subject. It is also heartening to know that the Baylor University Institute for Oral History continues to pioneer the study of oral tradition with such thoroughness and determination. Their work is part of a broader effort by Americans to understand their nation through voices of fellow countrymen and women. Whether speakers be "great leaders" or "the people," elders or children, their thoughts are significant and add to our understanding of American culture and its rich regional variations. Oral history unveils intimate, private worlds that create bridges between races, regions, gender, and age groups and bind us with people in every part of the world.

While oral history can be used effectively to study artists such as Charles Ives, its most dramatic results are seen with working class folk whose oral traditions are in fact intimately linked. Twain openly acknowledges his debt to folk speech as he begins *Huckleberry Finn*, and Ralph Ellison eloquently reflects on black folklore and literature in *Shadow and Act*.

It is interesting to note how recent works of literature and oral history borrow both form and content from each other. Ernest Gaines's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* is frequently read as oral history rather than as fiction. Gaines's young white interviewer who approaches Miss Jane and convinces her to talk is all too believable and familiar, the reader feels, to be read as fiction.

Theodore Rosengarten's *All God's Dangers*, on the other hand, might well be read as fiction. With a style reminiscent of Faulkner, Nate Shaw recalls generations of family and friends who populate a world similar to Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County. As Barbara Allen points out, oral tradition is a form of literature, and its sensitive treatment by a gifted scholar such as Rosengarten raises oral history to the level of art.

Writers are instinctively drawn to storytellers as counterparts whose craft is easily adapted to their own. Faulkner's Texas trader. Stamper, in *The Hamlet* and Eudora Welty's dramatic monologue "Why I Live at the P.O." clearly draw on the southern storytelling tradition. As we recognize the inherent beauty and importance of oral history, we should

note that it is also a key to literature as writers adapt both its structure and its content into their own work. The human voice is the focus of the writer. Once he or she hears it and sets it in a fictional place through literature, it is understood by all.

Like the writer of fiction, we can understand both the specific and the universal human experience through the spoken word. This fine study of oral history effectively moves us from children in Rabun County, Georgia, to a Connecticut composer and helps each of us discover the spoken word and its relation to the broadest ranges of experience.

William Ferris
University of Mississippi

INTRODUCTION

Oral history has come of age. After many years of discussing and debating the nuts and bolts of interviewing and transcribing methodologies and other basic concepts and definitions, practitioners have begun to think of oral history in the larger picture: what it means and what its values are. The possibilities for discussions of this type are endless; we cannot claim that the considerations presented in this volume are definitive, but they are intended as some of many necessary, toddling steps toward a deeper exploration of the subject known as oral history.

The symposium represented by these proceedings had its beginnings in conversations around the offices of the Baylor University Institute for Oral History. With over half a century of experience in oral history, the institute staff members have had time to draw some conclusions about the nature and value of this practice and the body of material it produces. When we step back from doing oral history long enough to consider its values and philosophy, our conversations tend to assume something basic, that the oral history interview is a unique experience, one of the most personal and telling ways in which the past and present intersect. In the interview setting, people of various backgrounds and temperaments, with widely differing expectations about the purposes and lasting worth of the interview, create through it a record of experience of profound meaning. Though a great deal of interviewing consists of slogging through tedium, even this can have an extraordinary power in the depiction of events and the very fact that people are cooperating to assure those events will not be forgotten. Our overarching question, then, is, besides the simple exchange of information, what happens when two people sit down together in the setting of the oral history interview? Our attempt to answer that question is The Past Meets the Present, a symposium held October 7 and 8, 1985, at Baylor University, and herewith a volume of proceedings.

In Barbara Allen, Cullom Davis, William W. Moss, Vivian Perlis, and Eliot Wigginton, we sought for the symposium speakers who are philosophers as well as practitioners of oral history, people who could speak thoughtfully about the place of the individual's memory in the overall sweep of historical understanding. Though they are not the only such people, these speakers represented to us one of the most articulate and provocative groups that we could assemble. They did not disappoint us. The quality of their thinking was matched by the care and good humor with which they imparted it, both on stage and off. The five speakers brought a wide spectrum of experiences and ideas; all shared a finely wrought sense of ethics and standards of quality in oral history methodology. Their audience was a widely varied one, including many students. Speakers and audience interacted in the spirit and sense of a true symposium, which by definition must be a learned discussion

which involves the audience in the deliberations. Program members maintained a high level of dialogue with those in attendance; they spoke with us as much as to us.

The symposium was a unique event. What can be said of a volume of papers and panels intended to represent this high discourse? As everyone who has tried to edit a volume of proceedings knows, as does probably everyone who has ever attended a conference and then read such a volume, some occurrences simply do not translate into print. Missing are some of the things that often make a public discussion most memorable, such as continuity jokes, on a superficial level, and running commentaries from the audience. On a deeper level, missing also from this publication is the wave of emotion that had some listeners at the point of tears during Eliot Wigginton's stories about the alliances between young and old in the Foxfire project. The delight of Baylor School of Music students at Vivian Perlis's intimate knowledge of Charles Ives and personal relationship with Aaron Copland is irreproducible. Difficult also to depict in print are the joy and deep appreciation Barbara Allen has for the stories people have shared with her, some of which she shared with us.

Another matter in the process of translating a conference such as this into print is the fact that some words are written for the eye, some for the ear. Speakers' asides, intended to make material more acceptable to the "live" audience, sometimes help make meaning clearer to the reader of a printed text as well. Asides are usually ways of editing on one's feet and would not be included by some writers, or editors, for that matter, in published proceedings; but some are here. We took some such material and some responses to questions from the floor from audiotape recordings of the symposium and included it in the proceedings in the form of footnotes.

A common criticism of symposium proceedings is the apparent unevenness of addresses, especially in form and tone. We view this as a strength, not a weakness, possibly because such contrasts appear every day in our oral history work. The difference, for instance, between the polished rhetorical style of Bill Moss and the casual storytelling of Eliot Wigginton points up the fact that, in oral history (as in all forms of human discourse) the vitality of a message, its depth, timelessness, and truth defy prejudices about style. Those who prefer formality and those who decry it should spend some time in an oral history project, or get together with Bill Moss and Eliot Wigginton. They would sample then the richness of personal expression and the mutual appreciation of those who believe that such differences, like those among regional cultures, should be celebrated, not eliminated or homogenized.

The volume is organized topically, but it also incidentally approximates the chronological order of the presentations during the symposium. The topics lent themselves naturally to their groupings; each speaker discussed first oral history's significance for his or her work—Moss as an archivist,

Allen as a folklorist, Wigginton as a high-school English teacher, and Perlis as a musicologist. In a summary of oral history's current state, historian Cullom Davis spoke on the dangers in less than scrupulous oral history from his vantage point as a leader in an oral historical organization. The third collection of essays deals with the value of specific applications of oral history technique and research, while in the final section the speakers attempt to prognosticate the future of the method and its uses.

A final word about the reasons a university hosts a symposium: In our case, we did it as a way of saying thank you. Partly, it was our offering to our community's celebration of Baylor's centennial in Waco, where the university moved in 1886 after its founding in the village of Independence, Texas. Further, it was part of our institute's fifteenth anniversary observance. In a larger, more personal way, we wanted to express appreciation to the people who have been involved with us over the years of our work by examining, critically but appreciatively, that which brought us together: oral history. We have benefited from countless acts of generosity. Some have given financial help, some volunteer time. Many have shared precious memories. Others, as interviewers, have helped give shape to the life stories we have been privileged to hear and preserve. Cherished streams of undergraduate and graduate assistants have given to us equal quantities of high-quality work and joy. President Herbert H. Reynolds and Provost John S. Belew have been supportive and challenging leaders. Dr. Reynolds's vision, particularly, has been critical to the life of our institute and made possible the symposium that produced these papers. All these people have enriched the life of our university, our region, and the body of scholarly and lay researchers for whom oral history is the key to the treasure house of the community memory.

A special word of acknowledgment goes to Michael Gillette, Jane Healey, Thad Sitton, Barbara Bennett, and Martha Ross, whose familiarity with speakers helped interpret, through introductions, their contributions to the symposium. Charles Morrissey and Ronald Marcello lent their expertise in guiding the panel discussions. Thomas L. Charlton, Jaclyn Jeffrey, and Lois Myers lent sharp eyes to the proceedings manuscript, while numerous student assistants helped with the word processing. Thanks also to Doni Van Ryswyk for her work on the index. The Baylor community as a whole, especially former colleagues Harriet Fadal and Susan Gregg, we thank for helpfulness to the planners and hospitality to the guests of the symposium.

In organizing this symposium and publishing this volume we set out to answer a question about the essence of oral history. The Past Meets the Present is part of the answer. Many questions remain unanswered, about this and many other topics; we will leave them to other times in other places, further symposia, future proceedings. The very fertility of oral history brings with it a multitude of complexities, and it should

provide many more interesting years of speculation and discovery of its riches. We look forward to being part of those discussions as they unfold.

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Rebecca Sharpless
Summer 1987

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I. THE NATURE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTRODUCTION

When oral historians get together, they nearly always spend quite a bit of time discussing just what oral history is. Because, as William Moss points out, it is a technique adaptable to so many disciplines and purposes, many observers have difficulty distinguishing oral history from close, or even distant, cousins. These first papers and panel discussion set forth some delineations, both in the way of definitions and of implications for the contributions of oral history.

Moss and Barbara Allen lay the etymological groundwork for discussion of oral history's place in the world of ideas. They also place oral history in culture by describing its relationship with oral tradition and with the broader range of folklore. They remind us that every culture, even a highly literate one, has a folk underpinning, the interpretation of which oral history helps greatly.

Eliot Wigginton, whose Foxfire work has attained great fame, and some controversy because of its involvement with folk culture, takes the consideration of values in oral history to a more personal level. He describes the effects on his students of their work in what is sometimes called cultural journalism and on the people they work with in Rabun County, Georgia, and beyond. Wigginton brought, as he usually does for such occasions, one of his students with him, Chris Crawford. Introduced in this session, he soon found himself barraged by questionsfrom people wanting to know the secret of the Foxfire "magic." The "secret" is obvious, when Wigginton and his students are in action. Rather than passive recipients, targets of teaching strategy, the students are co-creators of a remarkably rich learning experience, made possible by the key ingredient of the Foxfire success, Eliot Wigginton's respect for young people.

Vivian Perlis depicts her work in the writing of biographies based on oral history as one logical step in the developmental process of the oral historian. Her work requires a constantly shifting understanding of her role in creating and using the documents that grow out of her interviews, with all the potentional pitfalls and need for rootedness in high professional standards. Perlis, in a way, is the oral historian many practitioners only dream of becoming. Many have to content themselves with conducting interviews not knowing if they will be used by someone with the standards interviewers expect. More follows about the fastbuck artists of oral history. For now, however, Perlis offers for consideration the work of a biographer with both exemplary field research and editing skills.

Finally, Charles Morrissey helps wrap up this opening look at the nature of the phenomenon under discussion as symposium speakers join him in a general panel discussion. But first, William Moss, archivist, philosopher of oral history, student of the third world.

ORAL HISTORY: WHAT IS IT AND WHERE DID IT COME FROM?

William W. Moss

Oral history is a peculiar beast. It defies easy definition. A technique in the service of many disciplines, it fits neatly into no particular discipline, and it is found in many activities outside the world of academic disciplines. Its practitioners reflect the same diversity and, at least at times, uncertainty. To seek a way to recognize ourselves in the vast array of activity that resembles what we do, let us begin by turning the title of this presentation around and looking at the provenance of oral history.[1]

Where Did It Come From?

Oral historians—which is to say, those who do not mind being called so on at least some occasions—appear to be fond of seeking and finding traces of their craft in antiquity. Among others, they invoke the following: Before the advent of writing, all history was, perforce, oral. Early chapters of the Bible were based on oral history passed down from generation to generation. Ancient Greek mythology was a sort of oral history. Tribal oral history persists to the present day in oral traditions in both literate and illiterate societies.

In the Zhou dynasty of China (1122-256 B.C.,), the emperor appointed officers of the court to go out among the people to collect their sayings for the information of the emperor and for the benefit of court historians.[2] Somewhat more recently, Herodotus and Thucydides relied on eyewitness accounts in their written, narrative histories. Still later, in England, the Venerable Bede notes in his preface to a history of the church and people in England that he was not dependent on any one author but rather "on the countless faithful witnesses who either know or remember the facts, apart from what I know myself. "[3] In the same vein, as Paul Thompson has pointed out,[4] both Voltaire and Michelet relied heavily on eyewitness accounts to supplement archival research in their histories of French court and commons.

Oral historians are also fond of pointing out those who in their own time wished for something like oral history. Samuel Johnson's famous remark about there being no letters from the grave was cited by Allan Nevins and again more recently by Paul Thompson.[5] Aging American revolutionaries such as Adams and Jefferson bemoaned the fact that future generations could not really understand their [Adams and Jefferson's] times as they themselves did because all that the future would have would be imperfect documentation.[6]

Charles Morrissey has made something of a hobby of looking for the earliest generic use of the term oral history and has documented his candidate in the writings of Winslow C. Watson of Vermont in 1863.[7]

Others point to the "old-timer" tales collected by H. H. Bancroft or the "life histories" collected by the Federal Writers' Project as examples of antecedent oral history efforts.

What might be called the modern version of oral history really did not come about until after World War II. It did not really capture the interest and attention of many people as a vehicle for research until the latter half of this century, particularly the two decades 1965-85. 1 here were three major factors in this development.

Some credit must go to the great democratizing sea change in human history rooted in the European Renaissance and Reformation, through the Glorious Revolution in Britain, the French Revolution, the American Revolution, the later parliamentary reforms in Britain, the Russian Revolution two world wars, the liberation of former imperial colonies after World War II, and all the other attendant developments. These effectively wrested control of political power and of history from court and church, and permitted that control to become more diffusely if perhaps unevenly, distributed among the peoples of the world. What is significant for people and hence for history is no longer limited to the doings of church and state. People in general have more ot an opportunity to shape events and thereby to shape the history that is written of those events.

The second factor is the industrial and technological revolution that paralleled the democratizing change. It has brought about changes in transportation and communications that have made possible high-fidelity, lightweight sound recorders and the means to travel over long distances rapidly and relatively inexpensively. This same technological revolution has also given more people access to the media of communications. Control of information, therefore, has become less and less a property of the ruling elites, as ordinary people shape the character and content of information communications, and they thereby also affect the character of the history written from its detritus.

The final factor to credit is the earnest faith and hard work of Allan Nevins and his successors in applying this technology in the service of history directly and in giving us some means for ordering the myriad efforts at social self-definition produced by the populism of our recent centuries Technology affords the means of self-expression and impact on the body politic, and oral history affords a means for systematic ordering of the manifold expressions and for reflecting upon their several and collective significances in and upon the course of events. Something like oral history might have occurred and probably would have occurred sooner or later simply because the necessary ingredients were present in a critical mass in the social and technological mix. But Allan Nevins saw this early and worked hard to give it durable shape and form so that it might be equal to the complex task ahead, to endow it with sound historiographic discipline so that it might be capable of ordering the chaos of evidence available and likely to be recorded.

These three factors are the most important. But it would be negligent

not to cite another factor in the popularization of oral history. Paradoxically, this factor is the world of printed books and television docudramas. As much as the professional historians may see flaws and lack of historical discipline in the work of Alex Haley and Studs Terkel, there can be no doubt that their works such as *Roots, Hard Times, Working*, and other similar efforts by others, and the subsequent treatment of these in television have reached millions of readers and viewers here and abroad. They have brought something like oral history, if inaccurately so, to the attention of the mass public to a degree that no professor of history could dare hope, even in his most optimistic mood.

The popularization of oral history has not, however, been without drawbacks. It also encourages people to believe that it is easy to interview anyone about anything. It also suggests, wrongly, that it is not so much the understanding of history that is important but rather the degree of dramatic impact that the author or television producer can muster in marshaling his evidence and packaging it for public show. Nevertheless, I must reluctantly agree that not nearly so many people would have been attracted to oral history without this undisciplined and sometimes scary sideshow that earns more money and gains more attention than history professors can ever hope to achieve. We academics have to swallow that fact of life. We are unlikely to be funded adequately merely because we are right and our logic is sound. We are more likely to get funding for our work if we are taking advantage of a tide of enthusiasm in which those who provide the funding may not understand or care what academic disciplines require.[8]

Oral historians had to work so hard, from the 1940s through the 1960s, to gain acceptance by the more traditional historians within the academic community, and traditional historians resisted the blandishments of oral historians so earnestly that some oral historians are now somewhat appalled to discover that just about anyone can and may be "doing oral history." They feel a responsibility to impose the canons of the Oral History Association on the mavericks and fret over each new instance of violation of the rules of evidence or the manipulation of evidence, or the naive oversimplification of published evidence and analysis. There is probably little that the professional oral history researcher can do, however. Because of the easy availability of the tape recorder and the relatively simple process of recording an interview, there is likely to be about as much control of this as there is of jogging or Sunday painting. Nor should the oral historians feel guilty about this. It wasn't really their fault. While they were banging on the postern door of the academic castle, clamoring for admittance, the great sea changes of populism and technological revolution knocked down the whole wall and let everyone in, to come and go as they please. Rules and evaluation criteria may help to set and maintain standards against which activity and product may be measured, but they will never guarantee compliance.

What Is It?

All of this brings us to a notion of where oral history has come from and to, but not much of what it is. To understand what oral history offers as a discrete and useful way of looking at the past and mastering it, we have to examine its nature and character. To do this, it is necessary first to describe and define two other things that overlap and relate to oral history but are not oral history. One is documentary history; the other is oral tradition.

Documentary history is the mainstay of archives and of the more traditional historians. There are several assumptions implicit in documentary history, and there are some assumptions made quite explicit by its adherents. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such figures as Leopold von Ranke and Charles Seignobos advocated limiting the proper focus of history to documents and analysis of their form, content, and relationships to each other. This case rested in part on an observation, not altogether without reason, that literary history and the official court histories of the time and before were overly subjective and self-serving, often misleading, and sometimes quite erroneous as to fact. Sir Thomas More's treatment of Richard III, for instance, would not have been tolerated by the von Ranke school since it was not grounded in documents and textual criticism. That school taught that documents, kept in archives and safe from tampering, are unchanging and therefore reliable, while human memory tends to be self-serving and tainted by events subsequent to the history being studied. This reliability of documents as a basis for historical study and analysis gave historians something that seemed analogous to the real stuff of the world of matter being studied by scientists. The documents and their message contents, external seals and stamps, references from one document to another, and so forth, bespoke a mechanistic reliability that had its counterpart in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century engineering, a far cry from the insubstantial and unreliable yammerings of Jean Jacques Rousseau and the ideologues.

Documentary history was also based on an assumption that history was and should be political history, that the history of statecraft was so far above anything else in historical significance and impact on society that historians needn't bother with anything else. The argument was somewhat self-supporting since most documents in archives recorded the politics of statecraft and came to be there because they were thought to be the only things worth saving.[9] There is also in documentary history an assumption that what is significant to history are human transactions. This may perhaps owe its philosophical justification to the idea of social contract such as that found in Hobbs and Locke, but it probably goes back further to the more ancient commercial contracts and treaties between ruling powers. The notion that if a transaction between parties is significant enough both parties will want a record of it as a reliable future reference leads inevitably to a conclusion that such records document what is significant and that they are to be relied upon.

The further assumption, that these are the only records worth keeping, has proven less tenable with time. The real world would not hold still for the school of documentary history even if the documents would. Things other than statecraft became important to people, and some of them were documented outside official archives and some not at all, and not all documents were placed in archives to acquire the automatic reliability of continuous custody.[10] Historians, somewhat more unevenly and more slowly, until the post-World War II period, began to shift their ground from statecraft to a much broader range of subjects. Classes of people that had not heretofore had their own voice in the affairs of society, and therefore were absent from history, began to gain power and to demand not only a right to be heard and heeded but a right to their own history and its place in the larger world. They found some of the means for this in oral tradition.

Oral traditions are quite different from documents. Documents record discrete, individual human transactions. They are, individually, discretely limited to place, time, and action, and can only be made significant over a long term by being placed in sequences to show developments over time or space, and read in relation to each other as building blocks in a structure of evidence.

Oral traditions, on the other hand, are broad understandings of the past that arise organically in and out of the cultural dynamics of an evolving society. They are transmitted orally, and only orally, from person to person. They are spontaneous expressions of the identity, functions, customs, purposes, and generational continuity of the group of people among whom they arise. They come about and exist quite apart from any written language or recording devices and do not depend on them for durability. Oral traditions are not normally the direct, immediate, personal experiences of those who hold them in memory but rather the experiences of a whole ethos of previous generations, acquired from the last immediate one, and retold in the present as they are understood by the present generation. They contribute to the social cohesion, dynamic evolution, and durability of the culture they represent. They are changed by the changes in the culture around them, and in turn they serve to shape and mold the evolving culture.

Viewed in terms of a dialectic, documents record a discrete synthesis arrived at by reconciling the interests of parties at one point in time. Even a diary may be seen as such a synthesis of reconciliation between what a person has experienced and how he would perhaps have preferred it to be or what he might have feared it would be. Oral traditions, on the other hand, are a continuing and less specific dialectic between a whole culture and its past, or between an individual tradition-bearer and the past. Oral traditions contain a high degree of aesthetic understanding that belongs to the whole culture, apart from the particular aesthetic quality of the immediate expression. This quality deepens and enriches an understanding of the past that the mere contemplation and analysis of facts may not. Documentation is singularly deficient, though

not altogether lacking in this dimension of understanding, while in oral tradition it is an equal partner to content. Oral traditions, on the other hand, are not known for the unquestionable reliability of their facts. This is not to say that they have no value for dating events or supporting conclusions as to their significance. They do, and may thereby make some contribution to the marshaling of facts and the arrival at understanding that together are necessary to develop coherent mastery of the past.

Societies lacking written archives are among those that must rely at least in part on these oral traditions for their historical and archival base. They are assiduously collecting such traditions to have a fruitful store of them to study, analyze, and reproduce, and from which to derive hypotheses and conclusions about the past that can then be tested against additional evidence that comes to light from other sources such as archaeology. Even societies with written archives are discovering that portions of their people are perhaps not well represented in the archives, and collecting oral traditions of a specific subgroup in the society may be a useful thing to do to redress this imbalance. We are also discovering that sophisticated, literate societies may operate on several levels of communication, each of which offers a different perspective on the events and, therefore, on the past. A stream of oral tradition may parallel the stream of documentation in the archives, and both may parallel other streams of comprehension and expression in journalism, literature, art, music, and so on. In this light, oral traditions take on a significance to historical understanding and mastery of the past not allowed by the rigorous limits of the esteemed Leopold von Ranke and his followers.

We ought to pause for a moment, though, to note that once an oral tradition is captured on tape or in writing, what is captured becomes a document. In a sense it is no longer alive but rather like a slice of tissue on a slide under the microscope of history. Like other documents, it is but a representation of a moment in time, an abstraction from the continuum of human experience, a suggestive benchmark. It soon loses congruence with the developing and evolving oral tradition that changes with the changes in the society. There are even possibilities in which the captured oral tradition may become an embarrassment in society that has modified the "live" oral tradition to meet emerging difficulties. Or it may be used as a legal weapon in judicial proceedings where one claimant may rely on the current interpretation from the "live" oral tradition but the other seeks advantage in the *status quo ante* and can cite the "document" as the "real" and hence more reliable criterion for judgment.

Oral history is different from both documentary history and oral tradition. It came about at least in part as a rebellion against documentary history, however, and as often happens in such rebellions, the rebel has been influenced and sometimes shaped and limited by the very object of rebellion. Oral history, seen as an antidote if not antithesis to documentary history, has sometimes—in a determination to do what

documentary history manifestly cannot do—failed to take advantage of its full potential, particularly where use of oral history might parallel or overlap or even duplicate documentary history. Nevertheless, there are distinct differences, and these are what make oral history a complementry and supplementary tool of the historian's trade.

A Dynamic Dialectic

Oral history focuses on the direct life experiences of individuals, and the collector of oral history participates directly in a joint and cooperative effort with the narrator to examine and record the life experiences. If documentary history is based on discrete transactions or, more precisely, on their records; and if oral traditions are based on cultural dynamics, oral history may be seen as based on immediate life experiences of discrete individuals. These life experiences, stored in the memories of the people who experienced them firsthand, are reached, retrieved, and recorded by a process of disciplined inquiry known as oral history interviewing. This process not only searches for the remembered experiences, finds them, identifies them, and records them; it engages the mind of the rememberer in a dynamic dialectic examination of the validity and significance of these experiences. The recorded document is then available for future use as a source to be examined by the traditional devices of historical analysis. The dynamic dialectic at the heart of this process has two obvious participants, the inquirer and the respondent, each working at two levels: the immediate inquiry and the remembered past or body of background knowledge each brings to the interview. What is examined or concentrated on is derived from what one or the other believes to be significant and retrieves from memory in a fashion conditioned by the background experiences and memories themselves. Each participant examines and discusses or debates the immediate topic against the whole background of memory and development of both parties to the interview.[11]

This dynamic is inevitable in a good oral history interview. No matter how much or how little the interviewer actually speaks, he is a participant. He asks questions. It is very different from both documentary history and from oral tradition. In documentary history, an archivist has perhaps participated to the extent of selecting which documents to keep after the participants to a transaction have agreed on the shape, form, and content of the record. A historian may examine the document, but the document itself is passive, and any creative understanding or linkages with other facts not explicit in the document itself are made solely in the mind of the historian or in discussion with others. In oral tradition the separation between narrator and listener is given once the narration has begun, and the listener does not intrude, at least if he is a collector and recorder of the oral tradition. Indeed, in oral tradition collecting, the collector is enjoined to be as unobtrusive and unintrusive as possible so as not to disturb or influence the phenomenon being studied.[12]

There is a sense in which an oral history interview, however, is yet another human transaction, producing a document to be studied later, a record of what the interviewer and interviewee discovered of a life experience and wish to make into a durable document for future reference. This means that oral history does not depend solely on one individual memory but on two and their interaction. It is therefore also quite different from memoirs and diaries or autobiographies. The role of the interviewer in oral history is never entirely passive. It is always active, a dynamic interaction with the person being interviewed. The interviewer searches out memories and provokes reflections and evaluations of significance, even proposes hypotheses that may be tested against the individual's personal experience, and challenges the respondent into further examination and reflection on assumptions and assertions made in the first instance. Analysis and evaluation take place in and as part of the interview transaction itself. They become integral to the created record. This gives the historian who later examines the record some internal tests for reliability, validity, and significance to complement and supplement those he brings himself to the task of research.

Oral history, as commonly practiced, is highly individualistic. It assumes that the life experience of a single human being, or even only a segment of a total life experience, is in itself significant, or that it is sufficiently representative of a significant larger phenomenon to warrant inclusion in a data base for historical research. The underlying assumption is that each of us, no matter what his station in life, occupation, or character, is engaged in a daily process of negotiating the terms of his existence with the surrounding reality; that how this is done on an individual basis can be instructive on how it may be done on a collective basis; and that this contributes to mastering the past and coming to terms with historical ignorance. This is assumed to be the case whether the research focus is as narrow as a family or as broad as a nation. In some cases it may be that the external events are historically significant and the life under review becomes significant as a principal source of information about the events. In other cases a single life may, by the character of its own struggles with existence rather than the uniqueness of the events, warrant investigation. In yet other cases it may require an accumulation of a number of individual but related life histories to achieve a level of understanding of a previously neglected group.

In each of these cases, oral history is peculiarly able to bring to the process of knowledge and understanding the immediate and direct struggle of the individual human being engaged with the surrounding reality. It is important that the historian be able, however, as the artist often does, to get down to the basic bedrock of human experience in order to introduce the full significance of the human dimension to his analysis and conclusions. Oral history can do this as well as or better than any other primary source.[13]

Neat, one-sentence or even one-paragraph definitions of oral history are not very satisfactory. Reducing the whole scope of appreciation to

a simple aphorism or equation simply is not adequate. Understanding oral history requires a deeper and broader contemplation of the possibilities and limitations. But, to begin with, and perhaps to end with, it is a means, among others, of mastering the past and, thus, of coming to terms with our ignorance.

Notes

[1] Some of the ideas expressed herein also appear in *Archives, Oral History, and Oral Tradition: A RAMP Study* (Paris: General Information Programme and UNISIST, United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 1985) coauthored with P. C. Mazikana of the National Archives of Zimbabwe.

[2] Lu Xun, *A Brief History of Chinese Fiction* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1976), pp. 4, 9, and 21.

[3] Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), pp. 33-34. Bede, bless his saintly cleverness, left himself the out that modern researchers and writers can only dream of claiming for themselves, when at the end of his preface he disclaimed any responsibility for any error of fact in what other people had told him.

[4] Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), especially chapter 2, "Historians and Oral History."

[5] Allan Nevins, "Oral History: How and Why it Was Born," *Wilson Library Bulletin 40* (March 1966):600-601, and Paul Thompson, "Britain Strikes Back: Two Hundred Years to 'Oral History?" *The Oral History Association Newsletter* 15 (Summer 1981):4-5.

[6] John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, 30 July 1815, in *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: The Complete Correspondence Between Thomas Jefferson and Abigail and John Adams,* vol. 2: 1812-1826, ed. Lester J. Capon (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 2:451.

[7] Charles T. Morrissey, "Why Call It 'Oral History? Searching for Early Usage of a Generic Term," *The Oral History Review* 8 (1980):20-48.

[8] I'm reminded of a story of a brash young game warden, fresh out of agricultural school and a stimulating course in law enforcement. He was determined on his first assignment to make his district a model of respectability with respect to the game laws, but in the same district there was a notorious poacher with little regard for the niceties of the law. One day they met at the general store and in front of a dozen or so local folks the poacher invited the new warden to go fishing. The warden was trapped. He had to take the dare or his authority wouldn't be worth a nickel, so he accepted. Early the next morning just as dawn

was breaking they went out on the lake in the poacher's boat. The poacher took out a couple of hand nets and handed one to the warden, and then he took a stick of dynamite out and lit it and tossed it over the side. The explosion killed a large number of fish, which floated to the surface; the poacher began scooping them up into the boat. The warden, aghast at this unethical behavior, began to expostulate vigorously, citing the law, whereupon the poacher took out a second stick of dynamite and lit it and handed it to the warden and said, "You gonna talk or you gonna fish?" The path to popularity is dangerous; we can get to liking it a little too much.

[9] This notion persists in some quarters today. It is not uncommon, for instance, to find those in the judiciary who insist that only the final decision of a court has any significance because it is on the final decision alone that precedents for the future may be based.

[10] As later historians, particularly in our own time, came to reflect on this situation, they began to seek out additional sources of reliable information so as to understand the past better, and the range and scope of documentation committed to archives broadened substantially. This, together with the communications media explosion that began with the printing press, accounts for the high cost of modern archives. We may find that economics becomes the future arbiter of historical significance rather than what historians would like to know. We may find that we have to throw things away simply because we can't afford the storage space.

[11] For an analytical treatment of this dynamic, see E. Culpepper dark, Michael J. Hyde, and Eva M. McMahan, "Communication in the Oral History Interview: Investigating Problems of Interpreting Oral Data," *International Journal of Oral History* 1 (February 1980):28-40.

[12] There are ritualistic oral traditions in which the audience has established patterns of response to meet the formalistic demands of the particular tradition. It is essential, though, for the collector of oral tradition to be as passive and detached as possible so as not to disturb the quality or character of the phenomenon being captured. Intrusion may damage the validity of the sample. As a matter of fact, there are those who would argue that the mere presence of a recorder would damage the sample. Once recorded, the oral tradition is examined like any other document, the record itself being passive.

[13] Oral history adds to this dramatic impact of personal intimacy a reality that is undiluted by the artist’s interpretation. The artist may, and often does, enlighten us beyond the inherent capability of the subject by bringing to the subject his own depth of understanding.

ORAL HISTORY: THE FOLK CONNECTION

Barbara Allen

I'd like to begin, appropriately enough, with a little oral history, cast, also appropriately, in folkloric form. In 1974, as a graduate student in folklore studies at UCLA, I set out to undertake a survey of folklore in a small ranching community in northern California. What I came up with at the end of the project, however, was a collection of narratives about local history related by a single individual, a man named Sid Morrison, who was recognized and respected by his neighbors as a storyteller.[1] Sid told me stories about his grandfather, including this one:

> My grandfather and these two other men, they were looking for land. They came over from Weaverville, and they doggoned near starved to death on the way over there. It was in the wintertime and crossing Mad River, they lost their pack mule with all their food on it. And [there was] snow on the ground, snow so deep, and no food, nothing at all. . . .
>
> So they kept heading this way and they came to a place where they had started to carry supplies into the mines from Humboldt Bay and it got winter and they built this lean-to or cache or whatever you might call it and they stored the things that they had there, which was flour and eggs. And so one man [with the grandfather] had on an army overcoat with a lot of padding in the shoulders, you know, so he took some of that padding out and fired his
>
> pistol through there and got it afire and got a fire built that way. Then they took their ramrods and made a dough on them by opening a sack of flour and breaking a half dozen or so of those eggs in there—he said the eggs weren't very fresh, either—and stirred it around with their ramrods until they got a gob of that dough on their ramrods and then stuck it in the fire there. It made them awful sick, but it kept them from starving to death anyway. . . . And then it kept body and soul together until they were all right.

Sid also told me stories about his childhood. He described, for instance, playing a game called "cut the cheese":

> We'd make a mound of dirt so big around and as high as we could, and [put] a match down in the middle of it. And each one, each contestant would take a knife and they cut off so much of that dirt, as close to the match as they could without letting the match fall over. And they'd keep cutting, cutting, and pretty soon the match'd fall over. Then the other players would get to take that match and take three whacks with their knife to drive it into the ground. Then the one that knocked it over had to pull it out with his teeth.
>
> And that leads to something else. We were down abaloning. . . . (evenings, there was nothing else to do) and we went out on the

> sand and we were playing cut the cheese there and we saw these two girls walk by and they looked over there at us—we were all bent over there, you know—so they went on by. Then the next day we saw these same two girls again, and they came over and said, "Well, we wanted to get acquainted with you folks," they said, "but you were all saying your prayers, so we didn't want to disturb you."

And he told me stories about local events and local characters. This one is my favorite:

> This man who started the creameries that are now the Foremost ... the name of it was the California Central Creamery and when pasteurizing first became known ... he was very much in favor of it. So they had a big meeting, a big dinner one night, and they were discussing this pasteurizing thing. And some of them—it was too new and they were very much against it. And finally one man said, "Well, what's the difference?" he says, "The bugs are in the milk even if they *are* killed." And he [the man in favor of it] says- he was a Dane—he says, "My Got, mister, I would rather have a graveyard than a menagerie!"

The problem that confronted me when it came time to analyze the material I had recorded from Sid was to define it in terms that seemed consistent with its nature as a unified corpus of material. I didn't know whether to call it folklore or oral history. On the basis of content, it was clearly historical in nature. Indeed, Sid had a passionate interest in the history of the community. But he was also a master storyteller, with a real flair for transforming local history into dramatic narrative form. The issue of the relationship between oral history and folklore that was raised by this first field experience is one I've been grappling with in one way or another ever since.

Of course, I am not the first person to give consideration to this relationship. Lynwood Montell dealt with it at some length in his introduction to *The Saga of Coe Ridge*. And numerous folklorists and oral historians, both before and since, have wrestled with it, including Richard Dorson, Larry Danielson, Charles Joyner, and Gladys-Marie Fry.[2] In doing so, they have generated a substantial body of literature in which they question everything except the assumption that a connection does exist between the two. The very quantity of ink spilled on the subject seems to indicate that indeed there must be some link between folklore and oral history. After all, as the folk would say, where there's smoke, there's fire. But there has been some difficulty in locating the source of the flame; that is, scholars have not been able to agree on the nature of that relationship. One argument is that oral history and folklore somehow share the same nature and that therefore there is no need to make distinctions between them. This view seems to stem from the fact that oral history and folklore both rely on the interview as a primary research tool. The manual *Oral History: A Guide for Teachers (and Others)*, for instance, presents suggestions for folklore projects and

oral history projects in virtually identical ways.[3]

A second approach is to treat oral history and folklore as a continuum, in which folklore picks up where oral history leaves off. The usual distinction that is drawn between them in this argument is that oral history is firsthand information about the past, while all secondhand or "traditional" information is folklore. According to this view, Sid's story about his grandfather's ordeal would be folklore, while the story of playing cut the cheese would be oral history.

A third perspective on the problem finds a common ground between the two in terms of their content. That is, oral history and folklore are seen as overlapping bodies of material within which scavenger hunts can be conducted, with folklorists searching for evidence of folklore, like proverbs and games, in oral historical materials, and oral historians combing folkloric texts, such as ballads and ghost stories, for historical data. A fourth, but related, approach to the question regards form as the common denominator between oral history and folklore. Oral history, it is argued, is like folklore in its use of the spoken word as a medium of expression and of narrative, a genre with recognizable folkloric parallels, as a structuring principle.

None of these approaches to the relationship between folklore and oral history really seems to get to the heart of the matter, however. The argument that the two are fundamentally the same thing seems as arbitrary as the view that divides them up according to their presumed distance from the events or experiences they describe. Likewise, linking oral history and folklore on the basis of either content or form overlooks the obvious fact that a good deal of folklore is not historical and that oral history is not always folkloric. Perhaps the problem stems from the emphasis on finding similarities between them. What happens if we focus instead on the differences, if we consider oral history and folklore as two entirely discrete phenomena?

The Nature of Folklore

Let's begin with folklore. Discovering the true nature of folklore is not easy because it exists in a multitude of forms that seem on the surface to have little in common with each other. One form that folklore takes is verbal. Verbal folklore involves the creative use of language and includes such forms of expression as nicknames, slang, rhymes, riddles, mnemonic devices, jokes, proverbs, and, of course, narratives of all varieties from tall tales to family anecdotes.

An example of a folk narrative is the story of the traveler in Texas in frontier times. The roads then were nothing but dirt roads which meant in wet weather they were mud roads. And this traveler on a mud road was managing to slog along on his horse, and as he was going along he saw something in the road ahead of him, and as he approached closer he saw that it was a hat. And it was a good hat. So he stopped

and leaned 'way over his horse and picked it up, and as he picked it up he heard a shout. Fella said, "Hey, that's my hat!" And he looked down and, sure enough, there was the top of a man's head. And he said, "Well, do you need some help down there? Are you all right?" Fella says, "Well, I'm on a good horse. I guess I'll make it through all right."[4]

A second major form of folklore is custom, that is, traditional forms of behavior. Customary folklore ranges from home remedies and magical practices, such as putting cobwebs on a wound to stop bleeding, to games, to rites of passage such as birthday parties and weddings, to holiday celebrations. Holiday celebrations are prime examples of how folk custom is fraught with emotion. In my family, for instance, the custom is to open presents on Christmas Eve. One of my sisters married a man whose family opened presents on Christmas morning. And there was a lot of haggling between them until they finally agreed to do it one way one year and one way the next year.

A third major form that folklore takes is material culture, which includes such things as vernacular architecture, ethnic and regional foods, traditional crafts, and homemade toys. I suspect that most people know how to make a least one kind of folk toy—a paper airplane.

The fourth form of folklore, is, of course, music, either vocal or instrumental, performed solo or in groups. Folklore can thus involve the use of words or music, the use of actions, or the use of objects. Frequently it involves more than one of these forms. Certainly this is the case with the American holiday of Thanksgiving. Its celebration includes material culture in the form of special foods, utensils, and table decorations. It involves custom in the form of a family gathering and perhaps traditional activities, such as a family football game, as part of that gathering. And it can include verbal folklore in traditional toasts, prayers, teasing routines, or storytelling around the dinner table or in the kitchen.

Underlying all the diversity that folklore exhibits is its fundamental nature as creative expression. Folklore provides people with a means of expressing themselves in a patterned, often symbolic, always aesthetically satisfying way. Consider, for example, this assessment of the weather in South Bend, Indiana, in January: "It was awfully cold last night." Now consider: "It was so cold last night that the mercury in my thermometer had to jump up and down to keep warm!" Or Waco, Texas, in August. Compare "It sure is hot today" with "It's hot enough out there to fry eggs on the sidewalk." We might define folklore, then, as the creative expression of ordinary people in their everyday lives. Some items of folklore are "as old as the hills," to use a proverbial comparison; others are as new as the latest sick jokes about AIDS. Folklore can be historical in content, such as a family story of how grandfather or great-grandfather came to Texas, or it can be nonhistorical, such as children's games. The basic nature of folklore is that it is creative expression, regardless of content.

The Nature of Oral History

Now let's turn to oral history. Getting at the nature of oral history also takes some digging because the term *oral history* itself is ambiguous. It is most commonly used to refer to a method of historical data gathering: conducting interviews for the purpose of eliciting an individual's memories of and knowledge about the past. But it can also be defined as the body of information about the past that results from the use of that method. Oral history can refer, in other words, to the elicited memories themselves as the product of an oral history interview as well as to the process of interviewing. The memories elicited in an interview can be expressed in a variety of forms, ranging from one-word responses to rambling digressions to crisply structured narratives. No matter what form they take, however, their basic nature as historical evidence remains unchanged.

If folklore is defined as creative forms of expression and oral history as a body of elicited memories, then clearly they are not the same thing. If the defining quality of folklore is form, and the key characteristic of oral history is content, then asking the question, Is it folklore or is it oral history? Is certainly taking the wrong approach to a body of material such as that I recorded from Sid. The relationship between oral history and folklore is not a matter of either/or. It is instead a matter of both. In content, material can be oral historical in nature while in form it can be folkloric. What Sid Morrison told me about his grandfather is oral history; how he conveyed the information—that is, the story form in which he cast it—is folklore. This is a very useful distinction because it makes it clear that content and form are two separate components of the material, that historical content—memories of and knowledge about the past—becomes folkloric in form when people draw upon traditional forms of expression, such as narratives, to express themselves. This, then, is the real point of connection between oral history and folklore: the casting of historical experience into creative form.

Defining oral history and folklore as related to each other in this way also helps to explain why folklorists and oral historians tend to become impatient with each other's interpretations of the same body of material. Part of the problem lies in the differing perspectives that folklorists and oral historians bring to bear on those materials. To say that these perspectives diverge is to understate the case. Both oral historians and folklorists may be interested in human experience, but each discipline focuses on a different aspect of that experience. Oral historians are primarily concerned with the reality, the actualities of experience, while folklorists are most interested in the forms of expression and behavior that are responses to experience. Oral historians focus on the structure of experience—what happened; folklorists concentrate on the texture of experience—how people characterize or react to what happened. To use a familiar dichotomy, we might say that oral historians are concerned with life, while folklorists are concerned with art. The

focus of oral historians on content and of folklorists on form is reflected in the terms used by scholars in each discipline to refer to the human sources of their information. Oral historians use the term *memoirist*, which emphasizes content (i.e., memories), while folklorists use the term *narrator*, which emphasizes form (i.e., narrative).

Because oral historians, as historians, are accustomed to thinking of historical information as a record of experience, they tend to see oral historical sources as mines of raw data from which historical evidence can be extracted. They often assume that oral history stands in the same direct relation to experience as do other sources of historical information. In this regard, an orally recounted, eyewitness account of a disaster, such as a tornado or a flood, would be seen as analogous to a written report filed by civil defense officials, although tests for validity might be applied differently to each. Folklorists, on the other hand, are more concerned with the consciously shaped rendering of experience than with the experience itself. In analyzing oral historical materials, then, folklorists often focus on identifying recognizable patterns, such as narrative, that seem to reflect the influence of creative (that is, folkloric) shaping forces.

There is a difference as well in the ways that historians and folklorists conceive of the relationships that exist among testimonies from different individuals. Oral historians are interested in such testimonies as representing the unique experiences of the individuals from which they are recorded, each of which can be used like a piece of a puzzle in the process of reconstructing and interpreting the past. But folklorists look at those same testimonies for clues to links between individuals' experiences and traditional modes of expression; for evidence, that is, of an individual's experience having been cast into traditional form. William A. Wilson, for instance, has pointed out that the testimonies of returned Mormon missionaries exhibit strikingly similar structures, indicating that they have been influenced by traditional expectations of the form as well as the content of such narratives.[5]

Because of this fundamental split in their perspectives, oral historians find fault with folklorists for not coming to terms with what seems to be questionable evidence in folkloric materials. From their own point of view, of course, oral historians are right because they are primarily concerned with evaluating information in a rigorous manner in order to establish clearly and objectively what happened. This is not, however, what folklorists necessarily care about. For their part, they criticize oral historians for approaching folklore with a kind of literal-mindedness that overlooks the form into which historical fact is cast and which allows for the indirect expression of attitudes and beliefs that can be the most valuable feature of folkloric materials. From the folkloristic perspective, this is a valid criticism, for folklorists are themselves most interested in how experience is transformed into creative expression. In other words, each kind of scholar is criticizing the other on grounds that are valid only within the paradigm of the critic's "home" discipline,

just as each interprets the same materials within from that framework. Once the nature of the materials as consisting of both content and form, as being both oral history and folklore, is recognized, however, the source of the misunderstanding disappears. The link between folklore and oral history lies in the process of giving pattern and shape to historical experience.

Consider the personal narrative, for example. We all engage in the process of making stories out of our experiences. Sometimes we create such a narrative on the spot to fit the conversational situation. Sometimes we find ourselves telling the same story over and over on different occasions, slipping it into conversation when a particular topic is raised, such as near misses with death, embarrassing occurrences, surgery, the antics of children, telling someone off, and the like. Sometimes we even find ourselves in situations which we recognize as potential story material—"Boy, wait till I tell the guys about this!" or "Well laugh about this when it's all over." If folklore affords a means of transforming experience into verbal form, then the oral history interview, as a deliberate and conscious elicitation of memories, is the ideal setting for the presentation of historical content in folkloric form.

Memories into Narrative

The transformation of memories into oral form involves a two-step process of selection and shaping. In an oral history interview, people cannot tell all they know about the past; they must select relevant bits of information from a nearly infinite array of experience and knowledge. And they must shape that material into meaningful form. To do so, they often draw upon traditional modes of expression. Because of this, adopting a folkloristic perspective toward oral historical materials can often prove useful in seeing how folkloric form is used to give meaning to historical content. I would like to describe several features of folkloric expression that most often appear in oral historical materials and whose recognition can be most useful to the interpretation of those materials. The first two have to do with the forms that folklore takes; they include narrative structure, and formula and pattern. The last two features are related to the processes by which folklore is created and circulated. They are variation and localization.

The first feature, narrative structure, is the dominant form into which historical experience is cast. I use the term *narrative* not in the sense of a type of historical description but rather in the sense of the literary genre of story, a plotted recounting of experience, with inherent dramatic tension that is raised and resolved in the telling. Recounting an experience in narrative form means choosing a point at which to open the story and a point at which to bring it to a close. It also means emphasizing certain elements and eliminating others to ensure that there is a degree of internal coherence and consistency that will serve to convey the meaning of the experience. In oral history interviews, narratives may be

spontaneously created in answer to a specific question, or they may be well-formed, highly polished items in a narrator's repertoire. What makes narrative a particularly appropriate form of expression for people to use in the oral history interview is its ability to create sense out of experience, to convey not just what happened, but what it meant. One of the stories that Sid Morrison told me illustrates this point beautifully:

> They had an Indian massacre over on the island in the bay there at Eureka. They massacred a bunch of Indians over there. The Indians were all scattered there, what were still alive and finally, they run onto this one young Indian—eighteen, twenty years old probably—and he just dropped down on his hands and knees and looked right at them that way. And they told this one man there, said, "You haven't killed any Indians today. You shoot this one." So what could he do? He drew a bead right between the guy's eyes and he touched the trigger. And those old flintlock guns, the flash comes first and then it ignites the powder. And when this young fellow saw that flash, he dropped right down like that, the bullet went over his head, and he jumped up and run for the brush and got away from them. That was pretty quick thinking on his part.

The second feature of folkloric expression is that it comprises formulas and patterns that operate independently from narrative structure. Narrators often use formulas as a sort of traditional shorthand, to set historical events in time and space. For instance, narrators will frequently use the designation "over a hundred years old" or "more than a hundred years ago" to mean that the exact date of an event or age of an item lies beyond generational memory. There are also formulaic disclaimers that narrators regularly use as prefaces to their testimonies. These include, "Well, that was before my time," or "Now, I don't know if this is true, but the way I've always heard it was . . . ," or "You should have been here last year (or ten years ago or fifty years ago) when so-and-so was still alive. Now, he could have told you what you want to know." Such formulas seem to be offered as a means of absolving the narrators from, responsibility for the accuracy of what they say.

Related to formulas, but somewhat more subtle in form, are patterns that run like themes through oral historical testimony. A prominent pattern in Euro-American culture, for instance, is the occurrence of the number three as a means of organizing experience. If you stop to think about it, this can drive you crazy. I once made the mistake of having a graduate class in American folklore read an article called "The Number Three in American Culture," written by Alan Dundes, folklorist at the University of California at Berkeley.[6] And one of the students became almost literally obsessed with finding evidences of the number three in her life. It totally disoriented her for weeks. Think about such ordinary things as red-white-and-blue or on-your-mark, get-set, go, that have three parts to them. If you pay attention to the structure of fairy tales, you notice that there are very often three sons or three daughters, or there

are three tasks that need to be accomplished. Jokes also very often involve threes: "There were three ministers" or "There were three men." Narrators draw extensively upon this cultural pattern in shaping their descriptions of experience. The best example of this is a complex historical legend that Lynwood Montell recorded in Tennessee about Calvin Logsdon, a man who was hanged in the 1870s in Jamestown, Tennessee.[7] The whole story involved dozens of narrators recounting various parts of the whole. But when he put all of the story together, this is what emerged:

> There were three people who were charged with killing three other people. It was three days before the bodies were discovered. Logsdon was eventually charged singly with the murders because his two cohorts turned state's witness. Logsdon was tried three times in three different places. His case was appealed three times to the state supreme court. And during that process he spent three years in prison. When he was finally returned from Nashville to Jamestown to be hanged, he was put into the custody of three guards and when he was being hanged, the rope broke twice. He was hanged three times. Throughout the whole process, he had proclaimed his innocence, so before he was hanged, he made the prediction that, "If you hang me, it's going to rain for three days and three nights." When he finally was hanged, it took him twenty- seven minutes to die, which, of course, is three times three times three.

This is the most elaborate example I know of the number three occurring in oral history testimony. You won't often find it occurring that way, but very often you will find people organizing experience into threes, which indicates patterning at work.

The processes of folklore, as well as the structures, also show up in oral history testimonies. One of these is variation. Because no one tells a story twice in exactly the same way or always with the same effect or always to make the same point, each version is slightly different, even when the same person is retelling the same experience. The effects of variation are multiplied when different individuals are recounting the same event, especially through several generations. I discovered this in my own fieldwork in Silver Lake, a small community in southeastern Oregon. One of the biggest events—as some people called it, "the biggest thing that ever happened around here"—was a disastrous fire in 1894 that occurred on Christmas Eve. Nearly all of the people in the community, about two hundred of them, from miles around had gathered in a store building to have a Christmas program. They were up on the second floor, in the community hall, and toward the end of the program someone stood up on a bench to get a better view of what was going on and knocked a kerosene lamp over which immediately caught the whole building on fire. There was just one stairway, on the outside of the building, and it soon collapsed from the weight of people trying to escape. A few other people tried to climb out the front window onto a small porch, but it quickly gave way, too. Forty-three people eventually

died out of a community of two hundred—a terrible blow.

All of this is well documented in written sources, but there's a coda to the story. There was no doctor in town. And so, reportedly, a young man jumped on a horse and rode south for the nearest doctor, a hundred miles away in Lakeview, the county seat. This was in the wintertime, of course, and there was snow on the ground. Now, some people said the snow was belly-deep to the horse; some people said he rode the same horse all the way down to Lakeview; some people said it took him a day and a half to get down there and it took the doctor the same amount of time to get back; other people said, no, he got back
in twenty-four hours. There were all kinds of variations on the story. People didn't even agree on who the fellow was; one person even said when the rider got to the doctor and said, "There's been a terrible fire in Silver Lake," he—the rider—kept going![8] Now, the significance of these variations, which might give oral historians fits, is not that some of the versions are "true" and others "false" but rather that they revolve around a core of truth and that the variation on details—even embellishment of details—helps dramatize that core.

One more feature of folklore that is reflected in oral history is the tendency for folkloric materials in general circulation to become localized. Localization occurs when traditional material, whether full-blown stories or isolated motifs, becomes attached to persons or places familiar to narrators. Anecdotes about local characters are very often of this nature. One of my students at Notre Dame who did an oral history project in southern Tennessee came to me all excited and said, "Oh, I collected this great story about Tom Hayes, a very tall, raw-boned man with a squeaky voice, or a voice that breaks; sometimes it's squeaky, sometimes it's deep." And he said one of the stories people like to tell about Tom Hayes is about the time he was riding to town and somehow the mules ran away with him and the wagon overturned and he was trapped underneath. And he was shouting for help. He heard some people come by, and he was shouting, [high pitched] "Help me [low pitched] get out of here! [high pitched] Help me [low pitched] get out of here!" And the people said, "Well, listen, if there's two of you in there, surely you can push the wagon up and get out by yourselves."

Well, I thought that was a great story, too, and I immediately told it to Lynwood, and he said, "No, wait a minute. That happened in Tompkinsville, Kentucky." It's a kind of floating story that gets attached to particular individuals.

Russell Emery's story of a character in Silver Lake is a localized version of another localized narrative:

> There was an old boy down here; he was a little bit stingy. He always [had] whiskers and an old army overcoat and he looked like a tramp, but he was pretty well-to-do.
>
> One time on the desert when people was moving out—the first settlers—he had a bunch of cattle out about Wagontire [about fifty miles east of Silver Lake]. So he rode into this place and

he said [in a quavering voice], "What would be the chance for an old fellow without any money to stay all night?"

"Oh, sure, sure, get down, put your horse in the barn." So he put his horse in the barn and he stayed all night.

And this fellow [the host], was about ready to leave [the area], anyway, and he had a nice team and a wagon and a harness, and the wanted to sell them. So he got to showing this old fellow the |team and he said, "They're for sale." And they was pretty cheap, too. And this old boy, he couldn't pass that up. He knew it was cheap. So he dug down in his pocket, got out an old dirty check, and he said, "I've got an old check here." Said, "I might have enough money in the bank to buy that," he said. "Ill give it to you if you want." And he wrote him a check for his team and wagon and harness. And this fellow rushed into Silver Lake and caught the stage and rode to Paisley [where the bank was] and said, "Is this check any good?" And the banker said, "Yes! When you can get that old boy to write a check, why, take it!"

Sometimes these stories are told as personal narratives. Lawrence Deadmond of Silver Lake, Oregon, for instance, told me this story about a prank that he and a fellow musician pulled at a community dance:

We got to fooling around one time and decided that with the kids, we'd mix up their shirts and coats and see what would happen. These affairs would go on all night and the people would get home just at daylight in time to milk the cows. When it was time to leave, they just grabbed their kids and run. The women would fix breakfast and go wake up the kids, and they might have a kid from a couple up north of Christmas Lake [thirty-five miles away]! There were no means of communications but a few old phones on the barbed wire fence. Everyone had somebody else's kid.

It was an uproar and went on for a long time, almost a year. Everyone was curious and accused us, but we said, "I played the guitar and he played the violin and part of the time I played the piano. We couldn't have done it because we were playing." About a year after that, it began to get funny to them, and then we told them.

This same story is told in various locales in the American West as an actual occurrence. It also appears in Owen Wister's *The Virginian*.[9] It is a clear example of a migratory legend cast as historical experience.

The process of casting historical experience into creative or folkloric form, by drawing upon traditional motifs, formulas, and patterns, narratives and narrative structures, is a natural one and one in which people engage all the time—married couples sharing their day's experiences with each other over the dinner table, patients providing physicians with medical histories, grandparents telling grandchildren stories about their childhood, or narrators answering researchers' questions in interviews. While not all oral history is folkloric in form,

nor all folklore historical in content, the convergence of the two allows the past to survive into the present. As an insect is preserved in amber, historical content is preserved in folkloric form. Without being given such form, memory would perish.

Notes

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[1] The material I recorded from Sid Morrison served as the basis for an article, "The Personal Point of View in Orally Communicated History,"*Western Folklore* 43 (1979):! 10-18. The tapes remain in the author's possession.

[2] W. Lynwood Montell, *The Saga of Coe Ridge: A Study in Oral History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970); Richard M. Dorson, "A Theory for American Folklore," *Journal of American Folklore* 72 (1959): 197-215; Larry Danielson, "The Folklorist, the Oral Historian, and Local History," *Oral History Review* 8 (1980):62-72; Charles Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984); Gladys-Marie Fry, *Night Riders in Black Folk History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1975).

[3] Thad Sitton, George Mehaffy and 0. L. Davis, Jr., *Oral History: A Guide for Teachers* (and Others) (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983).

[4] See Mody C. Boatright, *Folk Laughter on the American Frontier* (New York: Macmillan, 1949), pp. 76-77.

[5] William A. Wilson, "On Being Human: The Folklore of Mormon Missionaries," *New York Folklore* 8 (1982):5-27.

[6] Alan Dundes, "The Number Three in American Culture," *in Every Man His Way: Readings in Cultural Anthropology*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), pp. 401-24.

[7] The Logsdon story is recounted in W. Lynwood Montell, "The Hanging of Calvin Logsdon," in *Folklore Studies in the Twentieth Century: Proceedings of the Centenary Conference of the Folklore*
Society, ed. Venetia Newall (Totawa, N.J.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1981), pp. 291-302.

[8] The Christmas Eve fire in Silver Lake is described in Barbara Allen, "The Story of the Christmas Eve Fire," *Northwest Folklore* 4 (1986):3-17.

[9] James Bratcher has collected a number of versions of this story in "The Baby-Switching Story," in *The Sunny Slopes of Long Ago*, ed. Wilson Mathis Hudson, Texas Folklore Society Publications 33 (Dallas: SMU Press, 1966), pp. 110-17.

REACHING ACROSS THE GENERATIONS: THE FOXFIRE EXPERIENCE

Eliot Wigginton

I appreciate very much the opportunity to address an occasion where, unlike most of the other occasions when I am asked to appear, I don't have to try to convince anybody of the utility of the work that we're involved with or the value of oral history. It's nice to be able to set all of that aside and concentrate on something fresh for a while; because to try to convince you of the other would be like preaching to the converted, so well avoid that.

I'm going to deal first with Foxfire as an organization that represents another slice of the oral history pie. It has been a source of some nervousness on the part of my more professional colleagues that we've allowed eleven and twelve year olds to go into the field and do some collecting. It was most dramatically a source of nervousness at a time when Richard Dorson, who later became, in fact, a friend and an associate, let out this blast at our work that appeared in *North Carolina Folklore*.[1] And it was a justified blast, and it was one that we paid attention to. It had to do with the fact that we weren't helping students understand, at the same time they were collecting, that there was also a far larger body of lore and material of the kinds of connections that Barbara Allen made in our last presentation—that students needed to be aware of to give them a sense of perspective and to give them a sense of where the material they were collecting fit in the whole scheme of things. And he was absolutely right and we paid attention to him to the extent that not only did we add a number of professional foiklorists, including some of his former students, to our board of directors, but also hired a full- time folklorist, George Reynolds, who had been a student of Lynwood Montell's and has been with us for ten years.

We also got some help from Lynwood Montell early on in setting up an archive that now has thousands of tape recordings, copies of which are on deposit at the Library of Congress in the Archive of Folksong and the State Archives of Georgia in Atlanta, all of which are cross- referenced and coded according to subject matter and the name of contact and the geographical location where that interview took place and all the archive cover sheets and data that the students have to distill out of that experience for purposes of accurate archiving. All became a part of a broader educational package that goes far beyond simply taking a tape recorder to Grandma Carrie's home and collecting a ghost story. And those confrontations with our professional colleagues have only served to enrich the program, not to distill it or distort it or destroy

it.

Meanwhile, we still are in discussion, and the arguments still go on about what you do with twelve and thirteen and fourteen year olds who don't have lots of the historical background or context necessary

to be able to really probe in an interview situation in many cases. But I'm not going to go out and fall on my sword over these things. The discussions continue, and the extent to which new suggestions are able to again enrich the program that we have is the extent to which they will be incorporated into it. Meanwhile, I like to think that the dialogue is a healthy one and will ultimately be even more productive than it is now.

Stumbling onto Oral History

The focus that I've been asked to look at has more to do with the chemistry that happens between the young people that are engaged in these interviews and the people that they interview themselves and the values that grow out of that encounter. So that's what I'm going to concentrate on and not make a lot of editorial comments, rather simply present some evidence. We'll go into it at greater depth in the discussions, but I want to set out what Chris Crawford and I stand for before going into the panels.

I've got to start, first of all, with a little story and it has to do with putting together the first issue of *Foxfire* magazine in 1966. And it has to do with the fact that, as part of that process, I had students doing a good bit of writing. The idea of putting the magazine out was not to document a lot of material but simply to give students a reason for wanting to pay attention to the writing that they were doing. And if there were an audience out there and their work was going to be published, it stood to reason to me that they would put some more energy into it than they would have otherwise. If you look at the first issue of *Foxfire* magazine, you'll see my first year's language-arts curriculum unfold before your eyes, because on the first few pages there are some haiku poems and those are followed by a few essays defending the use of a couple of novels that I was teaching in my class, one being *To Kill a Mockingbird* and the other one being *Lord of the Flies*, both of which almost got me fired. And you'll see a speech that a student gave to a local Rotary Club about the American teen-ager and what he stands for in 1966.

You'll see this hodgepodge, potpourri of stuff accompanied by a list of home remedies and a list of superstitions because, it seemed to me, that that was one way to involve all the students in the process of putting this magazine together. Everybody could go home and collect a couple of superstitions. And so the assignment was to do that. And we posted those lists on the wall in the classroom and added to them on a daily basis and eliminated the duplications, the idea being to save me from the agony of having to read compositions like "What I Did Over My Summer Vacation." The idea was to collect material that would really be fun to share with each other. I told the kids, "1 want good superstitions." You know, I knew a little bit about that part of the country. I was partly raised there. I said, "I don't want superstitions like, If you break

a mirror you're gonna have seven years of bad luck. I want the good stuff like, if you kill a toad, your cow will give bloody milk, and things like that." So the kids began to bring all this material together.

Meanwhile, they were also collecting donations from people in the community to get up enough money to print the first issue. They collected $440. That little act of generosity on the part of those community people, by the way, has now grown into an operation in Rabun County that has an annual budget of $475,000 a year and encompasses a whole range of activities. At any rate, in the process of the kids' going out into the community and collecting not only remedies and superstitions and money, they also ran into people like Sara Rickman who said, "You know, if you guys are going to put out a magazine about Rabun County, you really ought to have some of the good stuff from the county in there because that's the only way it's going to sell." She said "Like my father- in-law, for example, used to be the old sheriff in Rabun County. He was sheriff when the Bank of Clayton was robbed in 1936," one of our big events. She said, "You ought to really put stories like that in there, too.

So four students and I left after school one day and went to see Luther Rickman and said, "Luther, I've heard there's this great story about the time the bank was robbed." And his eyes lit up and he leaned back in his chair—he was sitting in front of his wood heater—and he said, "Well. I's getting a shave and a haircut in Roy Mize's barber shop when the Zade Sprinkle gang came into town." And this wonderful story unfolded about the Zade Sprinkle boys who came in in a Model T and went into the hardware store first with a little toy pistol they had and robbed the guns and ammunition they needed to go next door and hold up the bank and, at the same time, stole a big, fifty-pound keg of roofing nails with the big heads, and went into the bank and got thirty-six hundred bucks, jumped in the car and went out of town, threw the nails out on the road and blew the tires off of Luther's sheriff's car. He came chasing them in his barber's cloth and foam on his face. It's a wonderful story.

We got back to school and I said, "Now, there's a composition assignment." And the students that had been with me told the story to the kids in the class and I said, "Okay, that's your composition assignment for this week," and they handed in their papers. And I said, "The best one we'll print." And none of the stories were any good any more. Basically what they were were things like, "Luther Rickman was the sheriff when the bank was robbed and he finally tracked the robbers down and caught them and got the money back." And we sat around for days thinking about that, saying, What in the hell happened to that story? Because all of a sudden it wasn't worth printing—trying to figure out what we were going to do.

Finally one of the kids said, "Well, we could go to Bob Edwards and get a tape recorder." Bob Edwards runs a little local Kodak shop. We didn't have any money, didn't have a camera, didn't have a tape

recorder, didn't have anything. So we went to Bob Edwards, and Bob said. "Yeah, I'll loan you one and if you like it you can buy it later. You don't have to pay me now but if you want to take it go ahead and take it." Four of us went to see Luther Rickman one night after supper and said. "Luther, you've got to tell us that story again." And so Luther sat back and said, "Well, l's gettin' a shave and a haircut " and it all came right back out again, and it was all intact. And the next day I played that thing for every one of my classes. The kids clapped and cheered, and all of a sudden we had a good story again. And they transcribed that tape recording, and it appeared in the first issue of *Foxfire* magazine. Later on, about two years after that point, we found out that somebody had called that kind of stuff oral history!

Meanwhile, though, we had uncovered, sort of unwittingly, some fairly important values that resulted from that, not the least of which was that we got word through the grapevine that at the local shirt factory where a lot of the women in Rabun County still make, not a decent living, but a little money doing piecework, there was a copy of *Foxfire* magazine beside every one of the sewing machines. And during breaks the women would pick it up and read pieces to each other and said, "Hey! Have you heard this one?" Or, "Look here! Here's Luther talking." And we began to get lots of people coming up to us on the street inside that little town saying, "Well, we saw that magazine," and said, "You can forget that haiku poetry. If you want us to buy that magazine or if you want to put out another issue, we want more of them stories." So the second issue of the magazine was all about planting by the signs of the zodiac and the stages of the moon, and it sold out immediately. And that set up a process that still continues today well past its twentieth year.

At the same time another interesting thing is happening that's lots of fun. The students now run a television and videotape studio and do all the programming for the local cable TV network and have a music program and put out record albums and cassette tapes that are marketed nationally, and all this other work that has to do with our own culture and tradition. They have also created a radio show for Saturday mornings where we take the tape recordings of some of these folks that have passed on and give them back to the community through the medium of radio, and advertise in the paper the week before, announcing who's going to be talking on Saturday at 11:15. The inaugural show was Luther Rickman telling about the time the bank was robbed. Luther has been dead for ten or fifteen years now, and I had this vision of all these people all over Rabun County grabbing their kids and pulling them over to the radio at 11:15 saying, "Now, you sit down and listen to this. You've got to hear this. This is a great story." And so there's Luther again talking over the air. And it's one of the nice kinds of tight experiences that draws that community together when that material lives on and is shared constantly between the generations.

Memories and Friendships

But we also found that there were other values that came from these experiences. They did tend to be memorable for students for whom high school was not a particularly *memorable* experience in a positive sense. There's a wonderful poem by Richard Brautigan from a book called *Rommel Drives On into Egypt*. And the concluding lines of the poem are: "My teachers could have ridden with Jesse James for all the hours the stole from me."[2] If you talk to any of those kids who were involved in that first set of interviews, though, one of the high points of their high-school experience will be the interview with Luther Rickman and his wife sitting around that old wood stove. *That* material sticks and has consequence and lives on in a collective memory that turns high school into something positive and productive instead of the opposite.

We also found that there were enormously close friendships that developed. To introduce those, Luther, for example, became a friend. And Luther was responsible for our creating one of the most interesting articles we ever put together where he went out and found for us a number of different moonshiners that he had arrested at one point or another in his career. He had those moonshiners tell us all the tricks that they used to keep him from being able to find their stills. And then he revealed from his point of view what he had done to actually find them and capture them. They'd be saying things like: "And we knew we had Luther this time." And Luther would look at them and say, "Yeah, but I knew that this was going on." This really magical set of things began to happen, and Luther and I and the students became closer and closer friends as he got into the spirit of this whole thing. And at his funeral people that I had never met before---still don't know who they were--kept coming up to me and to some of the students that were there saying, "You know, the last couple of years of Luther's life he believed that this kind of thing you folks were doing with him was some of the most valuable stuff that ever happened in his life and that's all he talked about."

The same thing happened with a funeral I went to for Buck Carver, who was one of the moonshiners and became one of our closest friends, one of the typical country funerals, where there are hundreds of people gathered in a funeral parlor and flowers piled to the ceiling on these racks. And, of course, we sent flowers. But I went down there with Chet Welch. one of my kids who went on to Georgia Tech. We had interviewed Buck for years. There are pictures in the *Foxfire* magazine of Buck in my classroom with the kids gathered around in this tight circle. His wife came and got me and took me over to the casket, and she said, "I want to show you something. See those flowers right down there! Those are the ones that you guys sent. Those are from Foxfire and we moved all t he other flowers and put these up beside the casket because we knew that Buck would have wanted it that way." And so that kind of thing begins to happen. And family members come back

and say, "You know, we've got a six year old now that never met his grandmother and we'd like to have copies of those tapes, by the way, if you wouldn't mind, so that he can hear his grandmother talk"—or copies of photographs. And that happens constantly.

Later we began to uncover other values that have to do more primarily with curriculum design, and that's what I'm going to be focusing on specifically later in the symposium. But they have to do with things like the lessons that can come from this fact-versus-opinion kind of situation that so often crops up in oral history. We did a major issue of the magazine on cock fighting, for example, which is a big sport in our part of the world. And one of the people that we interviewed said, "You've got to understand that this has been around for a long, long time. I mean, this is stuff that has real precedent. You know, George Washington even fought chickens on the lawn of the White House." And we printed it right on, no problem. The kids got a letter from this guy in New England that said, "You guys need to know that the White House wasn't built then." And that creates in kids' minds a sense of or an awakening to history that hadn't quite been there before and the propriety of things that I think is important, on the need for checking things, and how you deal with something when it isn't true.

Another nice thing that came out of this activity in terms of schoolwork, too, is that in high school there's this incredible pecking order. Certain students get to do everything and other students get to do very little. And one of the magical aspects of this whole area of endeavor is that virtually anybody can play a part and make a valuable contribution, and it doesn't have anything to do with strength or looks or popularity or money or whether or not you have a car or any of those other trappings of adolescent prestige. Those all fall by the wayside in a situation like this; everybody can pitch in and play a part, which is another one of the values I think is so important, and also the whole fact that the older people that we interview give their friendship and give their affection to kids who often are floundering in terms of self-esteem and self-worth, and they give their affection unconditionally. That's really nice to see a kid who thinks that nobody likes him responding to someone like an Aunt Arie Carpenter. for example.

Values, Culture, and Community

I have some things that other people have written that might help put all this in even more perspective. We recently suffered through a year-long evaluation by a man named John Puckett who was getting his Ph.D. in education at UNC-Chapel Hill. He lived with us for a year and made notes every day, interviewed over five hundred people: former students, current students, administration officials, peer teachers, all the rest of the community, everybody. The comments that were made about this experience by former students were made completely independently of me or anybody else; it was just John and the former

student together. And we uncover in the process of reading some of these quotations still other values that emerge from this kind of activity, one of them being, for example, that the barriers between young people and old people and a reluctance to associate with them in the initial stages in meaningful ways come tumbling down. This is a quotation John Puckett got from Mike Cook.[3] It says:

> I saw a lot of beautiful things in old folks that had to do with Foxfire, which was a starting point for my communication with older people. It opened my ears to really hear what they were saying. That's the beginning of a road you start down that leads you to finding out that those folks who seem so different are people like you who've seen a lot of things and done a lot of things that you haven't. I regret that my grandfather died before I learned to talk to old people, which I learned to do when I was in Foxfire.

Or from Faye Carver, who said:

> I had always felt uncomfortable with them, not knowing what to say or do. I guess Foxfire taught me that they're people, too, not just something to be stared at and ignored. It seemed like every old person I saw, I knew they had a story. I knew they had a history. And just about every one of them had a history to be proud of and it made me want to know what that history was. Every one of them that I experienced had some knowledge that they could pass on that could help you in some way.

Or from Myra Queen: "I got kind of a city mentality sometimes, especially being with dorm students." There are a lot of city kids that are moving into Rabun County; it's turning into a second-home development community. "You'd want to be like them. They'd laugh at an old person wearing overalls, and I'd laugh, too, just to be kind of like them." She was a community student—a country girl—and it's the city kids that she was going to school with that would laugh at these folks. She'd feel like she had to laugh at her own people also because obviously that was the appropriate thing to do.

> Foxfire showed that those old people weren't just dumb old hillbillies, that they were smarter and had a lot more common sense than people were giving them credit for. It made me feel proud to be a part of that, a part of a culture that they came out of. I never really ever knew what my heritage was until I got into Foxfire. It seems like I had a lot more in common with these older people than I had thought. It was like you've got a thumb here but you've never paid any attention to it. It was like something that's been there but I never realized it was part of me.

It's the same kind of value that comes, by the way, as students begin to uncover aspects of their own culture that they hadn't realized. It is routine for me to get final examination papers from my students that say, as Teresa Cook said last spring, "Until I got into Foxfire, I didn't know I was from the southern Appalachian region," much less how to spell it, of course.

There are also things like human strength and values that students begin to appreciate and pick up on. The cause of some of this came out in a story from one of the people who was interviewed for the magazine *Foxfire*, fall 1984. There's a great sign on the back of that issue, by the way: "If you go to hell it's your fault." This is an old man in Kentucky that makes those roadside signs you see when you're driving down the highway that say, "Jesus is coming." That was one of them. Inside the same magazine there's an article about a woman named Carolyn Stradley. Allison Adams interviewed her. And one of the stories that Carolyn felt was important to share with Allison was one that goes: "One particular Christmas (I guess I was about eleven or twelve) I had been by myself." You have to know about Carolyn that her mother died and her father left; she was left alone to raise herself when she was a young teen-ager, and she lived by herself and raised herself alone in the mountains.

> Daddy was down here in the city with his friends and Eldon was away. I had got a Christmas tree and at school we had colored little strips of paper and glued them into chains. It was Christmas Day, but I felt very much alone . . . so I thought, "Well, it's Christmas and there's gonna be good spirit and good cheer at the preacher's house." I walked across the field, crossed the creek on a footlog, and then back up through another field to his house. When I went in I didn't feel any kind of uncomfortableness. Their house was so nice and warm, and I was cold. I didn't have a fire [at my house] that day and I was wet. [On my way over,] I'd slipped off the footlog and fallen down into the creek—-just like a kid will. The smells of the turkey and dressing and all that food had my mouth watering. You've got to look at an eleven-year- old kid to understand what I'm saying. Anyway, I went in and the only thing I could think was, "Oh, boy! I'm gonna get something to eat . . ."
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> And then all the family went in [to eat]. [I stood back because] I would never go into anyone's kitchen without being asked. Then the pastor came out and pulled me aside and he told me, "Carolyn, I don't get to spend much time with my family alone and I'd prefer to have this time and I would appreciate it if you could come back later." See, he'd been working in Atlanta some and preaching on Sundays up [in Youngcane]. He didn't say. "Would you leave?" He said, "Come back later," but I knew what he meant. I'll tell you what. That was probably the only man I've ever hated in my life. That man was an A-number-one hypocrite. I disliked him then and I dislike him today, and he's dead. . . . .
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> And from that day on, I vowed that I would *never* ask for anything from anyone for as long as I live. I'm still pretty strict about that. I've found that you have to ask for some things, but you don't beg for anything. To communicate and survive in this world, you have to ask in some way, but you never have to beg for anything. I haven't, and with God's help I won't. I'll beg God for help and

> forgiveness but not another human being. Even all that time that Arthur [my husband] was sick, we never had one penny of welfare![4]

Experiences like that and stories like that affected Allison in a pretty profound way. She went on to Agnes Scott College, majoring in English, and really developed a sense of the value of that human communication and what people have and the magic that stories can have and weave around you that she's probably going to make her life's work.

I can also share with you the kind of respect that the kids develop for the strength and resilience that humans have. In the introduction to an article that Kyle Conway wrote for the magazine, he talks about a fellow named Roy Roberts, who is eighty-nine years old. Roy was a former sheriff also up in Madison County, North Carolina. And Roy is this amazingly energetic person who through his life ran general stores. Roy was the first conservationist in our part of the world, I guess. Roy had these general stores and everybody that bought at the general store traded, of course, for goods. They'd come and get a pocketknife and they'd trade eggs and beans and that sort of thing. Often when the eggs came in they were spoiled, but he wouldn't know that until after the trade had been made. So he'd candle the eggs and he'd pick the ones out that were spoiled and set them aside. Then he developed a satellite business around those eggs that had to do with raising skunks. He raised skunks and sold skunks to people and fed the eggs to the skunks, and everything went around and around and around. It's a long story. It takes reading the article to get the full import of it, but he had about thirty related businesses, each of which fed off the others. And he became the southern Appalachian mountaineer's version of a millionaire, making a steady income when everybody else was living on potatoes.

Kyle writes in the introduction about Roy, "Then he went back to the shelter," this little picnic shelter he's got, "and sat around the cement picnic tables and he began to show us how to make some of the toys he used to play with when he was a child." This is after six solid hours of interviewing. This is getting way up into the evening. We've had supper.

> The directions he gave us will appear in a Foxfire Press book about toys and games. That's when the fun began. As he would remember things, he'd get excited and his eyes would light up. Once he had found the right wood, he sat and whittled while he reminisced until late in the night. After showing us how to make two different kinds of whistles and a pop gun, he decided he needed a different stick of wood. So off he went, romping through the woods at ten o'clock at night with no flashlight in the pitch black darkness. He left us sitting there dead tired and sleepy-eyed, wondering what was going on. We could hear him thrashing around and breaking branches. By the time we'd figured out what was going on and had started out after him, he was already back with a satisfied grin on his face holding a perfect stick for the next toy.
>
> We were ready to call it a day but he was just getting started.

> We finally got to bed after he showed us how to make a fly gun.
>
> Roy was waiting for us when we woke up the next morning. He'd been up for hours and he had already fed the squirrels that come every day to the roof of his springhouse on wooden poles he has running from a nearby tree. He had even made another toy that morning that shot little wooden pegs.
>
> We made some more tape recordings and a water gun. Then we drove ten miles over the mountains to see Roy's abandoned charcoal kilns and his old stores.

He used to produce charcoal for the Asheville market.

> He had us struggling to keep up with him as he pointed out different features. After that, Roy took us to some land he used to own and he showed us a lake and a dam he had built himself. We straggled behind him as he marched up and down hills and through the woods.
>
> Finally, all of our film was used and all our tapes were full, so we packed up and headed for home. We were all worn out and slept all the way. They say time flies. Well, I don't think even time can keep up with Roy Roberts.[5]

There are also things that happen as students encounter older people and the certainty of death and the usefulness that older people have even in their later years. A quotation from John Puckett again:

> Working with Foxfire made me see that the old mountain people were strong and useful people who weren't afraid of dying. Seeing that they still had useful lives helped me get over the fear of death that I had seen as the next step after getting old. That had been the only thing I had seen about being old and it frightened me but that fear's laid to rest.

The Value of Relationships

In conclusion, a couple of short things. The people who get interviewed, I think, often realize the importance of what is going on despite the fact that they're sometimes mystified by the process and by the equipment.

Stanley Hicks said it in one way very nicely. Stanley Hicks is an old banjo maker that we interviewed. He lives up around Boone, North Carolina, and he's been there forever so all of his family is from there. Stanley says:

> My daddy's gone on, my grandpa's gone on, my great-grandpa's gone on, but they still live, you know; the spirit's still here. Your folks can die and go on but they're still here. I don't know whether you ever thought about it like that or not, but I can show you. Here's Dad's dulcimer. This here's the dulcimer that he built years ago. It still lives; it's still here. You see, it's not gone. And the same way about myself. When I'm gone there's some of my stuff that the young ones—-you know, it still lives.[6]

And he recognized what was happening with those tape recorders in

that room and with what was happening between the students and himself.

I want to close with a piece from the introduction to *Aunt Arie: A Foxfire Portrait*. Aunt Arie was one of our favorite people, lived alone in a log house for the last eight years of her life, developed a relationship with the students that was intense and she is the inspiration for the Foxfire play. Jessica Tandy, when she did the *Foxfire* play with Hume Cronyn and Keith Carradine on Broadway, was Aunt Arie Carpenter. [7] At this point in the book the students that I've had with me have been up in Aunt Arie's house almost all day. We've been interviewing, we've been visiting, we've been talking, been enjoying each other, and it's getting time to go and there's always that difficult point in time where you don't know quite how to break away but you've got to get down the road. You've got these kids whose parents are worried about where they are, and it's after dark and she doesn't want you to go because she's there by herself and there's this crazy pull that goes on between you that makes things awfully tough sometimes. And in this introduction I describe some of what happens at that moment.

> Outside, it was dark and chilly. I found myself imagining what someone from the world down the mountain would have thought had he been drawn by the fireplace glow through the window of this log house, looked in, and seen the incongruous sight of those kids in Adidas and Nike running shoes and jeans and Izod shirts hunched around a fireplace with an old lady eating popcorn.

Popcorn was her favorite thing. She always pulled out this old "capper." She raised popcorn and kept it for the kids and every time we went we popped popcorn in this old tin thing with a broom handle on it.

> Aunt Arie's stories became shorter, her laughter somewhat more agitated, as she sensed that I was working up to saying that I thought it was time we left. I had kids to deliver home, papers to grade, another day of work ahead. As always, I tried to make the break as gently as possible by involving the students in one last round of activities that we hoped would make life a little easier for this lady. We turned on the porch light and replenished the supply of firewood next to the front door. One of the students brought in a large back log and wrestled it into position in the fireplace. With luck, it would last several days. Another student wound her clock. Another refilled the box of kindling wood in the kitchen from the supply piled on the back porch.

She still cooked with a wood stove.

> We checked to make sure the doors were tightly fastened and the food was all put away and everything was battened down for the night. Then we gathered again in the living room and stood somewhat awkwardly near the front door.
>
> At that point I witnessed the spontaneous and absolutely unprompted ritual I had watched so many times before in that same room: the students all lined up and each, in turn, grasped Aunt Arie's hands, said good-bye, smiled as she told each, in turn,

> that she'd be waiting for the next visit, gave her a long hug, and went out the door. The first student out groped his way to the car and turned on the headlights so the rest of us could see the way. Several waited behind while I said good-bye and then walked with me across the yard. Aunt Arie made her way to the end of the porch and stood there in the cold as we started the Bronco, turned around, and headed down the driveway. Looking back, we could still see her standing there, waving, refusing to go back inside until our lights were completely out of sight. We rode home, for the most part in silence.
>
> That routine became something of a constant in the lives of Aunt Arie, myself, two of my staff members, and many of our students. It varied somewhat, of course. It varied on those Saturdays when we stayed most of the day and worked in her garden. It varied on the several Sundays when six or eight of us took her to church at Coweeta Baptist—or to church functions like all-day singings and dinners on the grounds—and then accompanied her back home to change into the more casual clothes we had stashed in the car and spend the afternoon. It varied when we had our annual Christmas party for her and much of the popcorn we popped got strung and put on the tree we had brought instead of into our stomachs. It varied on the occasions when I went to get her and brought her to school so she could sit in front of a whole class of young people again—-as she had done for over sixty years in her Sunday School class—and talk and laugh and answer questions. It varied on the evening I went to get her and brought her to school, to a room where a number of community people had gathered to watch a film made about her—the first movie she had ever seen. And it varied on the occasion when several of us took her out to lunch at Kate's, a favorite small local restaurant with about eight tables and booths, and the first restaurant she had ever eaten in. (She was mystified by the whole experience, finally ordered hamburger steak, couldn't get used to the idea that someone else was in the kitchen fixing food for her, and, when the waitress brought it to our table, apologized for causing her so much trouble, saying. "Now, you didn't have to do that, honey. 1 could have done that myself.")
>
> But what was unvarying was the way she greeted us with those two arms thrown into the air, and the way she said good-bye— the bookends of our relationship. And, of course, the love that radiated out of that tiny woman into the soul of every young person I know of that she ever met.[8]

Absolutely true.

I'm going to give Aunt Arie the last word. And one oi the nice things I think about oral history and about the kind of work we're involved in is that people, even when they're past the age of being really physically active, can still participate and can still make a contribution. She says,

in an interview, the following:

> Ah, you get t-studyin' back over where you've been and what you've done, I get amazed t'death. I certainly do. I don't see how I ever done it. Eighty-eight year t'tag up and down this road is a long time.
>
> I use t'be awful stout. Worked pretty hard. I enjoyed it, though. I'd rather work as t'play. Heap rather work as t'play. Still that way. I'll tell you th'hardest work I do nearly is drawin' that water out a'th'well t'wash with. That bucket's heavy. Yes sir. Sometimes I can't hardly make it go. Busted one bucket all t'pieces. Let it go and down it went. And there was two'r three days there when I done without fresh water. Just couldn't draw it, so I drunk ol'warm water. Now they come and wanted t'put a pump in th'well and I coulda, but Ulyss' [husband] didn't want me to. You may think just whatever you please, but I hate t'go ahead and do things that Ulyss' didn't want me t'do. Now that's th'truth. Ever' time I go t'do somethin' he didn't like, I remember that. If he was here now, I don't guess he'd care a thing, but still it's there. Yes sir. It's right there.

He'd been dead for seven or eight years but she still wouldn't let anybody put a pump in the well because he didn't want it.

> Then th'other day, I tried t'do a little bit in th'garden and found out I couldn't do that. Come in here and set down and rested a little while. Then went t'th mailbox, come back, and went in the'garden again. I thought I *could do somethin'*. So I took that chair out there and set in between th'rows and set down in it and go t'pullin' weeds out a'th' peppers. I love t'work, but now I'm as slow as cream a'risin'.
>
> Th'saddest thing that's come my road, though, is not bein' able t'do near what I use to. I can't get about and get stuff t'give people like I use to. I use t'have a lot a'stuff t'give t'people, but I just can't do it now. Can't give away quilts now like I use to cause I can't quilt. Can't cook'em somethin' good t'eat and give'em a good drink a'water like I use to cause I can't hardly cook.
>
> And there's s'many things I'd love t'be able t'show you younguns how t'do, but I can't now. Can't crochet any more. Can't card and spin any more. Can't make willer baskets and bottom chairs any more. Can't do hardly anything I use t'do.
>
> But I can still love.[9]

Notes

[1] Richard M. Dorson, "The Lesson of 'Foxfire,'" *North Carolina Folklore Journal* 2l (1973): 157-59.

[2] Richard Brautigan, "The Memoirs of Jesse James," in *Rommel Drives On Deep into Egypt* (New York: Delacorte, 1970.)

[3] John Puckett, "Foxfire: Mediating the Twain," Ph.D. diss., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1985.

[4] Carolyn Stradley, "The worst feeling was being alone, never really feeling like I belonged," *Foxfire* 18 (l984):184-85.

[5] Kyle Conway, introduction to "I Done Some Work in My Time," by Roy Roberts, *Foxfire* 19 (1985):4, 7.

[6] Stanley Hicks, "It Still Lives," Foxfire Records.

[7] All the books, of course, and the magazines are all copyrighted. What happened in the case of the play was that since they wanted to use the material out of the books that the students had collected, Hume Cronyn, as is the case with all these things that we do, had to come down to Georgia and present his case to the students and explain to them precisely what it was he wanted to do with their material, which was a nice experience because the kids didn't know who Hume Cronyn was----just another Florida man that wanted to steal their stories. And they really grilled him. Then in typical public-school fashion, after they were through asking him questions and all that, he had to go out into the hall while they talked about it. Then they voted and one of the students went out and said, "I guess you can come back in now," and told him what their vote was.

But we retained a lot of rights to the material and we retained artistic control so that all of the revisions of the script had to go through student committees that examined them. If the students said that they wanted a piece of the play that had been written, out; it came out. And they exercised that right on three different occasions to pull pieces of the play out that they felt were stereotypical or insulting or off base. And they were absolutely right. One of the scenes in the play had a young high-school teacher who was working with students on a program similar to Foxfire, a young woman who just came back from school, standing in a bar drinking bourbon, getting in a shouting match with a local real-estate developer about what he was doing to the mountains. And I can promise you that no young schoolteacher, no old schoolteacher, would be seen in a tavern in any community where we taught drinking anything, not even water, with any community people and hope to keep his job. And those kinds of things came out of there. But the kids retained artistic control and they retained all the movie rights and retained final say on the script.

When Doubleday wanted to publish the first *Foxfire* book, we were presented with an offer, and the process that I just explained was gone through to decide whether or not we wanted to do that and we did a lot of wrestling. That book, by the way, to date has sold over three million copies. It's the single best-selling volume in Doubleday's ninety- plus-year publishing history. They've never published a book that sold more copies, and it was written by ninth- and tenth-grade kids that weren't supposed to know how to do English yet, so I get a lot of

satisfaction out of that. Confounding stereotypes about what young people are and are not capable of doing at any point in time is what teaching is all about.

[8] Eliot Wigginton, introduction to *Aunt Arie: A Foxfire Portrait*, ed. Linda Garland Page and Eliot Wigginton (New York: Dutton, 1983), pp. xxviii-xxix.

[9] Carpenter, "Livin' by yourself ain't all roses—and it ain't all thorns," in *Aunt Arie: A Foxfire Portrait*, pp. 198-99.

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ORAL HISTORY AS BIOGRAPHY

Vivian Perlis

Oral historians almost always come to oral history from someplace else; very few are born into the field. Rather like Californians, they come to oral history carrying the baggage of their own or previous disciplines along with them. This is, of course, a major stumbling block for those attempting to develop a basic methodology to apply to all oral history projects. It would be unusual, indeed, if my lifelong involvement in music did not give result in a very different approach from one in political history, regional history, and so forth.

I have recently made a limited comparison in my mind (and in the flush of early love for word processing) between the computer and oral history: Both are indispensable tools, and we wonder how we ever did without them. But, as young love matures, the realization sets in that the objects of our fascination cannot do everything after all. Both oral history and the computer depend heavily on what is fed into them; neither functions independently. I won't belabor this comparison, made lightheartedly of course, except to say that oral history is no less exciting or less valuable to us than when we first found it, but our use of it is surely more sophisticated today, with the experience of what it can and what it cannot do, and with the recognition that the quality of oral history depends on how each individual mixes it with the contents of that heavy baggage of his or her own discipline.

My own work in recent years has centered on the application of oral history to the memoirs of major figures in American music, principally composers. The result had been twofold: archival and biographical. The former has been activated by the founding of a project at History, American Music——for the collection and preservation of the recollections of a wide range of creative contemporary musical figures; the latter with biographical publications on major figures, using oral history interviews as the principal source. While I will touch upon aspects of the Yale project as our discussions proceed, I want to center first on two different kinds of oral history biographies and the differences between them in concept and approach: one on deceased innovator Charles Ives, consisting of interviews with those who had known and worked with the composer; i.e., secondary sources; the other on America's leading living composer, Aaron Copland, based on interviews directly with him.

Music is a language of sound. Those living their lives communicating in this language hear differently, think differently, and are removed from the rest of the world as though they were speaking a foreign language among us. Composers who deal constantly with abstract sounds, rhythmic, harmonic, and formal structures, often do not articulate their thoughts and ideas in normal language very well or very willingly, It has become historical fact that composers rarely speak for themselves.

Publications by composers have been infrequent—a breakthrough was Henry Cowell's *American Composers on American Music* of 1933[1] and that extraordinary "small magazine," *Modern Music*, that ran from 1924 to 1946 and featured articles by composers themselves. Nevertheless, its editor, Minna Lederman, in an interview with me described her frustration at the quality of some of the writing: At one point she posted a note on her door saying "English spoken here." Of course, there are many exceptions, including Virgil Thomson, Copland, and Milton Babbitt, the last of whom has no trouble speaking, although his words are often so technical that the general listener has difficulty understanding much of the content. We have a great deal of excellent interview material in the Yale archive, but interviewing composers, who think in musical rather than verbal sounds, holds a special challenge. Moreover, most composers are so absorbed with their current composing that it can be difficult to discuss earlier works. Copland described this by saying, "Past works seem to take on a life of their own once sent out into the world." On the other hand, a work in the fragile process of composition is often best left undisturbed and undiscussed until finished. So, the practice of oral history with composers holds particular features and problems.

Lessons from Ives

Let me take as an example the case of Charles Ives, the subject of my first extensive oral history project, and of the book that developed from it, *Charles Ives Remembered: An Oral History*.[2] Ives was a man of such paradoxical nature, a mind and personality of such complexity, a musical genius so rare that he existed on a different plane from the world around him. The temptation is to mythologize those few figures of genius among us and to place them on distant pedestals to be admired from afar. Biographies of creative geniuses are usually written by admiring students or followers, often adding to the adulation, rarely including the critical, and further extending the distance between the artist and his public. We are not often presented a candid, close-up look at a great artist. Now, Ives was a composer who wrote a great deal and vividly about his own music; nevertheless, and probably due to his hermetic existence for many years, he has been an elusive and mysterious figure. Oral history went a long way toward making Ives more accessible. By interviewing many different people from various walks of life, a multilevel portrait evolved realistic one- for after all, Ives lived his life on many levels as we all do: as child, husband, and father, as businessman, neighbor, and friend, as a New Englander, as a musician, and as colleague to fellow composers. This oral history technique is particularly appropriate to Eves. According to his friend, the great Ives scholar and performer John Kirkpatrick, Ives had the kind of mind that could encompass many things at one time[3] and often composed music with layers of unrelated sounds simultaneously, because that is

the way he perceived the reality of life. By projecting such a multilevel look at a complex man the complexities remain intact. Except for those who must simplify, pigeonhole, and categorize, the resulting picture of Charles Ives is one that shows him as he was perceived by others, and perhaps gives some insight into the man, the influences on him, and the reasons for his particular kind of music. Danbury, Connecticut, residents recalled Ives as a boy, the youngest organist in the state, and one ninety-eight-year-old gentleman, Philip Sunderland, even remembered Ives's father, George, the black sheep of the family, who was a bandmaster, not proper work for a real man.[4] Babe LaPine, the barber of Bethel, Connecticut, knew Ives as an old gentleman-farmer---old overalls and boots. Who ever would have thought he was a musician?[5]

Business associates from the Ives and Myrick insurance agency describe Ives's extraordinary inventiveness in the business world coupled with his quirky humor and philosophical idealism. Composers talk about Ives's use of all sounds of New England life, past and present, gospel, ragtime, Stephen Foster, popular tunes in his work and his influence on them as an innovator who opened the door to self-expression.

I recall shortly after finishing the Ives interviews the arrival of a young Ivesian at the Yale Music Library where I was working in the Ives Collection. She had driven cross-country, ditched her car in a snowstorm, and after various trials and tribulations arrived to study in Ives territory. She greeted me breathlessly: "Thank God," she said. "Now you can finally tell me what Charles Ives was really like." Much to her chagrin. I had to respond that I didn't presume to know what Ives was really like, for the more I found, the less I could describe in a few words. The material, I felt, spoke best for itself. "Listen to the interviews," I told the young scholar, "and draw your own conclusions from them."

Only after the Ives project was finished was I convinced to edit the interviews for publication. I consider the taped interviews themselves the heart of the project rather than the transcripts or the book. In general, my attitude about tapes versus transcripts differs from some other oral historians I have known, who place the ultimate emphasis and value on transcriptions; perhaps because of my background in music rather than literature, I am convinced that the original source material is the recorded interview itself. I judge those scholars harshly who come in search of material and request only transcripts. This seems to me particularly surprising where biography is concerned. Imagine writing a biography of someone and not taking the time or having the curiosity to listen to the actual voice of the subject if it exists! The decision to publish the Ives material only after the project was completed has become a pattern in my work during the years that Oral History, American Music, has been in existence. I know that oral histories done specifically for a book project are a valid way to proceed, but it seems to me that oral histories per s are fuller and less prejudiced in any particular direction when accomplished without a personal goal or use in mind.

The Ives project was my first venture into oral history. My work

had always been in music, as harpist and pianist and as music librarian. The Ives interest came not from an interest in oral history as such but from a realization that additional documentation was needed about an extraordinary figure in American music while those who knew him were still alive. The Ives oral history project is an excellent example of oral history as an adjunct to existing archival materials. Upon completion and since, I am told, it has added substantially to Ivesiana and in the other direction, the extensive correspondences., manuscripts, and memorabilia to which I had access while doing the project not only presented a goal of excellence but a rich source for preparatory study. But the Ives project was unusual within the musicological community. The technique was new as applied to music research. It was not easy to convince the then Yale librarian of the merits, even the propriety, of a member of the library staff marching around the countryside with a tape recorder and applying for funding to do so. It was not until the book was published, indeed not until a favorable review in the *New York Times* gave the stamp of official approval, that the way was open for the recognition of oral history in music and as a valid approach for music biography.

In concept, the Ives project and the book publication that followed were not very different from what Thayer did when he searched out people who had known Beethoven or from most biographical pursuits undertaken soon enough after the subject's death with the aim of obtaining material from survivors. The difference is, of course, in the use of the tape recorder which makes possible more exact quotation directly from a source and the preservation intact of that data. We all know of many such projects in the past and some being conducted currently----in fact, I suspect that there are at least a few similar biographical projects under way by participants in this symposium. The Yale project, while concentrating heavily on interviews with living figures in American music has, since the Ives project, been responsible for two additional extensive documentary projects on major figures: Paul Hindemith and Duke Ellington. Many Hindemith students and colleagues have had substantial careers of their own, and Ellingtons contacts were with many of the outstanding jazz greats, so that on these projects each interview is valuable for its own sake as well as a contribution to an overall portrait of the composer.

Interviewing many people in various walks of life about one subject is very different from the kind of project during which one explores a life and career with one living subject. For one thing, all of these people must be found and permission must be secured, not from one person alone, but from many. And some of those people might, as on the Ives project, take years of detective work to find. For example, Ives's personal secretary, Christine Loring, to whom he dictated his memos over a long period of time, left no trace. Neighbors said she was alive, but none seemed to know what had become of her. Long after a seemingly fruitless search, it came to light that a Mrs. Rodman S. Valentine of

Refugio, Texas, had known Charles Ives. She turned out to be the elusive Christine Loring, and I interviewed her in Texas. This interview appears in edited form in *Charles Ives Remembered*. Another missing person case was Mary Shipman Howard, who had a recording studio in New York known as Mary Howard Recordings where she recorded many of the musical greats, including Ives at the piano. The recordings were known privately and a few pressings were in the Ives collection at Yale. After two years of searching for Mary Howard, and hearing from several sources that they thought she had died in an auto accident, a colleague asked me, "Now, who is still in your missing persons file?" I mentioned Mary Howard among others, and within minutes. she was at the other end of the telephone. It turns out that she had been injured in an accident and left New York for a long recuperation, married, and lived thereafter in Connecticut raising dogs.

Not only is detective work involved, but a degree of flexibility, I think, that is not necessary in dealing with one subject: Ives's jovial insurance partner and others from his business world meant acquiring information about the insurance business and exploring files and scrapbooks at MONY (the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York), and Ives's family and some of the Danbury and Redding neighbors showed some of the insistence on privacy that was so vital to Ives himself. Soft-sell persuasion had to be used arid visits in advance with tape recorder left at home, wearing gloves and no makeup—off to Danbury for tea. I was to hear later in the project that, at one such visit, a request to use the telephone almost turned the elderly interviewee against me forever! The point to all this is that, although each interview in such a project tends to be short, each takes securing, arranging, research, and preparation, and a great deal of time and patience. One learns to be flexible—each interview presents a different set of circumstances and requires yet another kind of approach. And this aspect is of course very far from single-subject interviewing. In addition to patience and fortitude, such interviewing requires a sense of adventure, a willingness to deal with the vicissitudes of travel and a different setting for each interview, and an ability to play various roles. I have climbed into a glamorous government limousine to the Pentagon for an interview one week, and tea in Danbury the next, and browsed through music manuscripts in a Greenwich Village composer's loft the next, and so on. The connection between all of these people and experiences is, of course, the main subject, and in the cases of Ives, Hindemith, and Ellington, these were men of such extraordinary personality and stature that they seemed to draw other creative and interesting people to them. Ultimately, all were willing to participate in oral history projects, feeling privileged to have had the experience of these musical geniuses in their lives.

I am convinced that such projects are best conducted by one person, as with the Ives oral history, or by two, as with Hindemith and Ellington. Moreover, the responsible persons should have been deeply involved in the subject matter previous to the project's conception. It is not possible

for an interviewer, no matter how quick a study or how thorough his research, to accumulate the kind of background that a scholar immersed for years in the material accumulates and draws from. Nor is it possible for a neophyte to absorb the entire body of a lifetime of difficult compositions to understand and absorb them quickly.

In 1974, after the Ives project, the Schoenberg Institute in Los Angeles asked if I would do a similar oral history of that great and influential twentieth-century composer. The Schoenberg centennial was being celebrated then, the same year as the Ives centenary, and those who had been directly involved with Schoenberg were also becoming scarce. My response was as follows: I would plan and direct such a project, but in order to ensure a result that could compare to the Ives project, a Schoenberg scholar must be found to proceed with the interviewing—- someone as knowledgeable in advance about him as I had been about Ives. Alas, and for various reasons, that project was not carried through other than a few family interviews that I conducted because of the urgency of the situation and because the background needed to do them was of a general biographical nature. Similarly, with the Hindemith and Ellington projects, both were under my administrative direction, but each functioned with interviewers carefully chosen from specialists in the field. One interviewer with a solid background, with interest and commitment to the subject, who will carefully research for each interview, finds that knowledge and experience becomes cumulative and increases as the interviews proceed. Before long, that interviewer is drawing not only on a previous storehouse of information but adding to it. Moreover, if that interviewer is successful in gaining the confidence of the interviewees from the start, the way may be eased toward securing other important interviews from the network of people who often know each other. In reverse, of course, if the interviewer makes a poor impression in the early interviews, the entire project can be placed in jeopardy. So there are many important reasons for few and knowledgeable people to be involved and to be carefully chosen and supervised. Obviously, this can be difficult to achieve on large and long-range projects; compromises often must be made, but I suspect that the compromises compromise the results. I extend this line of thought even further with the opinion that advantages continue to multiply when the interviewer is able to edit his own transcripts and when the interviewer and author are one and the same—if a book publication evolves.

Interviewing for biographical projects about deceased persons is double trouble. Why? The interviewer must not only be knowledgeable about the subject but with each and every interviewee as well. Let’s say that I. knowing a great deal about Ives, am about to approach composer Darius Milhaud to ask what his experiences with Ives were. To do this, I must know not only about his relationship with Ives, be familiar with their correspondence, et cetera, but it behooves me to learn a substantial amount about Milhaud and his work as well. This is for tactical as well as substantive reasons—no famous man wants to talk about another

famous man. You can be sure when I met with Milhaud, we didn't begin by talking about Ives. In fact, the interview took place in Milhaud's family hometown of Provence. The mistral was blowing, which gave me a terrible headache, but Milhaud found it so stimulating that he spoke at length about the meaning of Provençal landscape on his music and of the importance of everyday sounds, the wind, the windows slamming, et cetera, to his composing. Along the way the brief but telling anecdotes about Charles Ives were incorporated into the narrative. Although it had been indeed double trouble, the Milhaud interviews were well worth it, for as it turned out, they were the last ever done with Darius Milhaud, and they have a special quality about them due to the location and circumstances. I did not know it at the time, or when I interviewed other composers connected with Ives, such as Elliott Carter and Carl Ruggles, that these composer interviews would lead to the founding of a project at Yale to collect and preserve such materials on a continuing basis. I did know that taking the time and trouble to enlarge the scope of the Ives focus was the best way to get to Ives and, fortunately, with an archival bent, I sensed the value of collecting a broad range of material, considering the advanced ages of many of the composers.

Lessons from Copland

Now to turn to my biographical work with Aaron Copland, and the situation of working with a living composer. At the conclusion of the Ives oral history project, the nucleus of interviews with composers heralded the start of Oral History, American Music. One does not go far in American music without bumping into Aaron Copland, so diverse, broadly based, and influential has been his involvement in musical activities through so many years. Copland had been important to Ives's career, having premiered some of his songs early on; therefore, I had interviewed him in 1971 for the Ives project, and he subsequently wrote the foreword to *Charles Ives Remembered*. In 1975 I approached Copland for interviews to be preserved in Oral History, American Music. He accepted without hesitation, because, as he told me, he admired the Ives oral history.

We worked together at his home in Peekskill, New York, regularly during 1975 and '76. Interviews were conducted every week or two and lasted two to three hours. We always worked in his music studio. Scores, correspondence, and files are stored in a small room in the basement. The studio, the most important room in the house, with the piano, is lined with books and recordings. Its glass window walls on two sides open to a terrace, gardens, and a distant view of the Hudson River. Copland is fond of describing the time he first saw the studio and was struck by the thought that a composer could write music in that room. Life in the Copland household is informal and relaxed; Copland has never been less than welcoming. I have never seen him rushed or harried.

We visited before each interview session and had lunch or dinner afterward. Copland showed good-natured wonderment at the miracle of the tape recorder (as he has done with copying machines, computers. and other "moderne" inventions) but never concern or hesitation about using it. Whatever nervousness I felt at the start soon dissipated, because Copland was so easygoing and seemed to be enjoying himself thoroughly. It is this kind of relationship — one that only develops with time — which is lacking with a project such as the Ives research when an interviewee is only seen once or twice. Of course, the interviewer must maintain a delicate balance in long-range interviews with one person that preserves the mood of warmth and informality and still keeps the interview orderly and fruitful. Perhaps all interviewers have had the unnerving experience of conducting an interview at which the participants have had an absolutely marvelous time only to find upon listening to the tape afterward that the jokes and laughter mean very little to anyone other than themselves and that important material has been neglected. This happened rarely with the Copland interviews; despite his casual and informal manner, Copland was surprisingly difficult to interview.

I was always aware of the need to have my material very well organized and clearly in mind; Copland's answers to questions were often not as fulsome as one might hope or expect. Unadorned and unexplained "yes" and "no" responses were frequent. It was not evasion or resistance, but I had to be prepared with information and questions and determined to delve deeper and to repeat myself in other sessions if answers were not forthcoming. Copland in his lecturing and writing (he had already published four books and innumerable articles and reviews) and in his music has always had a straightforward, no-nonsense, nonembroidered style. He says what he has to say—-no more and no less. His friend and colleague William Schuman told me in an interview that Copland's consistent good nature belies a strong critical facility. "He does not suffer fools lightly," said Schuman.[6] From early on, I saw this at work, and it kept me on my toes no matter how relaxed and fun-loving Copland was. He would examine a question before answering it. He would not answer blithely just to be polite, and if he didn't remember something, he said so. If he didn't approve of a question or thought it was in need of qualification, he would explain it, always politely, always patiently. He didn't try to make things either hard or easy for me—only honest. This is Copland's way.

It was not until fairly recently that the thought has occurred to me that Copland's recent and gradually increasing memory loss may have been in its incipient stages during our interviewing sessions of ten years ago. Even then, I found that the presence of scores, the playing of recordings, and other reminders helped greatly to elicit specific information, particularly about the music. I was soon given free use of his extensive collection files and as we worked, I often pulled out sketches and manuscripts to refresh the composer's memory. Sometimes Copland would turn from the desk to the piano to play through what

I would hand him, and we could discuss the meanings of markings on a score or marginalia or tentative titles. Copland has always had a resistance to analysis of his music, either by himself or by others; although pushed to it, he prefers that any kind of strict analysis "be left to those who know how to do it." Even then, he had not much use for it. He is not very interested in describing harmonic or rhythmic intricacies verbally. He would never initiate such activity, but with score or sketch material in front of him, questioned about specific choices and reasons for them, he was perfectly willing to give answers. However, I cannot imagine Copland voluntarily taking a piece of his music and analyzing it from top to bottom. It simply is not of interest to him. In this regard, I found once again that the more I knew about the music under discussion, the better able I was to trigger the right memory button.

As with many elderly persons, Copland's memory is far better when dealing with early years, but for a famous man who has been interviewed so often and written about by a great variety of people, it was those early years that had been neglected. This is not an unusual situation; rarely do interviewers have the time and inclination to explore genealogy, family, childhood years, and early influences on creative figures. We have made it a practice in Oral History, American Music, to deal with this kind of material in depth, knowing it is likely not to exist elsewhere and sensing its meaning and primary importance on the life and career of a composer. Exploring the early influences on Copland was important, for those formative years already show a mature young Copland whose steady, frugal, fun-loving, confident, independent personality changed little through the years. With the opportunity to explore the early influences on Copland in a leisurely way, some surprising things turned up. For example, Copland's mother's family emigrated to America hut did not stay in New York. The Mittenthals traveled cross-country with their store on wheels and horse-drawn through Illinois and on into Texas. There they settled in Graham and Waxahachie; Copland's own mother grew up in Texas, not returning to New York until she was a grown woman of nineteen. The taped segments of Copland as he is led to talk about his mother reveal that of his parents, he was closer to her, and with further questions, he recalled that she sang folk songs when he was very young. It didn't seem to occur to Copland through the years as he was asked, "How come a composer from Brooklyn wrote cowboy music?" to think that his mother's life and her influence on him might have been at least a partial answer. The Copland tapes are filled with rich material, some of it anecdotal. Copland has his favorite stories which he has polished and told over and over again, always the same way, but with great style and humor.

> COPLAND: I was, I suppose, very much the baby of the family. And since we lived above the department store that my father owned, the family life was very much. I would say, involved in the whole business world which was right downstairs. It wasn't like something that my father went to. We were all in the midst of it, and on

> busy times soon as I got old enough at Christmastime or Easter, one always helped out in the store. I remember when I was old enough I used to take the cashier's place at lunchtime or dinnertime when she went out. We used to stay open until nine p.m. It was a neighborhood store; to me, it was one of the largest stores in that particular neighborhood and it always seemed very active to me. We may have had a dozen employees. So it was a kind of a small world in itself where one experienced a lot of different things.
>
> PERLIS: And a lot of different people, I expect.
>
> COPLAND: A lot of different people, yes.
>
> PERLIS: It wasn't a Jewish neighborhood, for example.
>
> COPLAND: It wasn't a Jewish neighborhood at all. No, there were rather few Jews who lived there, It was mostly Irish and Italians, and a fair amount of black population, too, not immediately there, but as customers, I remember them. But the Irish, especially, the tough guys around the block, they were something of a problem on the way to school, that kind of thing, you know.
>
> PERLIS: It was much less segregated.
>
> COPLAND: It wasn't segregated at all.

He recalls something of the effect of his mother's growing up in different parts of the country on her, and therefore, on himself.

> COPLAND: She was very different from my father in background, see. Her family had come to America and they didn't stay in New York. They went first to the Midwest and then down Texas way, so she grew up partly in Texas. She didn't remember the old country at all. I don't remember exactly at what age she was brought over, but she spoke without any accent. She thought of herself as sort of Texan by background, I think.

Copland describes his views of the less-than-favorable response to his daring *Piano Variations*.

> PERLIS: Did that bother you in any way?
>
> COPLAND: No, I was absolutely convinced about the *Piano Variations*.
>
> I had worked on them a long time and I wasn't going to be upset by them. But I assumed it was going to be a temporary difficulty in putting them over. No, you have to be pretty convinced about what you're doing; otherwise, they are many, many reasons for not doing it financial gain, no good criticisms in the papers the next morning. You really had to be brave in that sense, and, really, the bravery comes from the conviction that you're absolutely sure that this is what you want to do and it's meaningful to you and you just assume that it's going to take time before other people get around to it. That's the history of new efforts in music. People don't fall in love with the thing, or if they do. it's a rare event.[7]

No matter if we have heard these stories more than once. Here they are preserved for those in the future who have not and will not have the composer among them. And here we can point to an important

difference in working with a living composer, particularly one whose presence has been such a vital part of his impact on his audience. Copland's unusual blend of simplicity with intelligence, humor with utter seriousness of purpose, humility with confidence, plainness (Leonard Bernstein's favorite word to describe his friend and his music) with downright charm, have become part of the American consciousness. The importance of preserving not only the factual information and material but the persona——his voice, his manner, his expressions——this opportunity made possible by oral history interviews and further enhanced by videotaping is a crowning achievement of oral history. This is obviously one major advantage of working with a living composer. You ask, Why expend such effort on major figures such as Copland and Bernstein who are already highly visible and covered by the media? The sad fact is that without oral history archives and collections much of the existing material on famous people disappears within a period of time. Preservation is simply not the business of the media.

Neither Copland nor myself ever mentioned or thought about book publication until after the oral history interviews were completed in fact, it wasn't until I arrived one day with the transcripts for his corrections that he said, "Good heavens, these look like the basis of that autobiography I always thought of writing but never got around to." I cannot honestly set a date or recall an exact time when a decision was made to work together on a book. We had finished the interviews for the Yale archive; Copland read the transcripts, making corrections along the way. One day he handed me a draft of a chapter on his boyhood in Brooklyn that he had written earlier in preparation for an autobiography, and I found an outline and other jotting toward an autobiography in his files. Given another set of circumstances had Copland worked on this book earlier when his memory was sharper— I doubt he would have sought a coauthor. Indeed, he would not have gone out to look for one in any case had I not appeared on the scene, nor would he have proceeded if he had not thoroughly trusted my abilities and judgments. Running throughout Copland's interviews is his oft- repeated phrase, "I was a lucky guy." This when he came upon Nadia Boulanger as a young student in France; this when it happened that Serge Koussevitzky's first year as head of the Boston Symphony Orchestra coincided with Copland's return to the U.S., and so on. According to Minna Lederman Daniel, what Aaron means by "luck" is that he seemed always to be the right person, at the right place, at the right time. And she makes the important point that he always seemed to know when the circumstances were absolutely right for him. She believes that this pertains also to the interviews and to my presence on the scene.

Once we got to work on preparing book materials, there was never a moment of doubt or hesitation on his part. And his trust in my decisions and opinions often gave me courage to continue. It still does. Again, Copland's genuine humility and gentility belie the strength of his character, just as he never hesitated to proceed with the *Piano Variations*

when he knew it was not an "audience-winning piece" or with a Hollywood score when he knew his colleagues would say he had given up on serious music, and so on. Once decided, Copland wasted no time or energy worrying about an outcome. I never heard him express concern over how things were going or how critics might respond. Copland took an active role in final decisions as well as with detailed editing, and he always listened carefully to my ideas and suggestions. We discussed various formats for the book soon after the decision was actually made to proceed. It seemed to be a major stumbling block that had to be decided before putting materials together. I was not interested in being Copland's ghost writer or in a book totally comprised of "as told to." Discussing the situation with William Schuman, always helpful to me with major decisions, I explained the dilemma of having so much material and the problem of how to handle all of it, and he said, "Don't worry about it; it's like a piece of music. The material will take over and the form will reveal itself quite naturally out of what you have and what you will find that you need." That was wonderfully foresighted.

Those familiar with the first volume, *Copland: 1900 through 1942*, know that the form of the book is rather unusual. The text is in Copland's words, drawn from enriched oral history transcripts, divided into chapters which are interspersed with interludes written by myself. Moreover, edited interviews with others about Copland frequently appear at appropriate times in the text. There is no word in the English language to describe accurately an autobiography written by two people. We had no choice but to call this an autobiography, although it is a blend of autobiography, biography, and oral history. From the start, we needed a family genealogy which Copland himself could not write and, indeed, did not see as much need for as I did. So I researched and wrote it. And when we came to the end of Copland's years of study in Paris, a connection was needed to explain the cultural, historical forces at work, and so I wrote an interlude on the status of American music as Copland returned from Paris to the U.S. in 1924, and so on. With my active interests in oral history, it was natural to include interviews with people close to Copland at various times in his life and career. Therefore, at appropriate places interviews were inserted with Copland's lifelong friend Harold Clurman, with Nadia Boulanger (whom I had interviewed earlier for Oral History, American Music), with Bernstein, Agnes DeMille, and many others. Considering the wealth of visual materials available, the temptation was great to include photographs and reproductions of correspondence and scores, some of it never seen before. So, the form of the book did evolve from the material as we proceeded. Once I remarked to Copland that his book was going to be unusual. He responded in his unflappable way: "That's never bothered me."

There are, in some cases, restrictions one might feel as a biographer working with a living figure with whom one wishes to retain a friendly relationship. It might be more exciting if I could report a down-and- out disagreement with Copland with perhaps a dramatic reconciliation,

but there were no such theatrics. There were times when I anticipated difficulty. I knew, for example, that Copland had stayed clear in the past of his socialist connections in the thirties. They had caused him pain and trouble in the McCarthy years and he preferred, while never denying anything when asked, not to deal with those matters at length. I wanted to write an interlude exploring the political and economic effects of the thirties on American music and on Copland in particular. and I explained my position to Copland, pointing out how important it was for him to come out directly with his brief and minimal political involvement, including the fact that he composed a song, "Into the Streets May First!" that was published in a 1934 issue of *New Masses*.[8] Copland listened to me, thought for a moment, and cheerfully said, "Okay by me."

Readers will find little gossip in Copland's book because he is not a gossip, and little about Copland's personal life. He has lived a public life in music, never making any public statement other than concerning his music. For Copland to change his ways now in his autobiography would be totally out of keeping with his life and the way he has lived it. I, as his biographer, might have decided otherwise given a different circumstance—that is, if I were writing the biography of a person no longer alive. The best Copland's own autobiography can do is reflect him. I think it does that.

Afterword

I want to say a few more words about video interviews and television documentary as a form of biography. in recent years, Oral History, American Music, has added a video unit to its activities. If it follows, as I believe it does, that the aim of oral history is the preservation of the personality of an interviewee as well as what he has to say, then the use of video technology is as important as the use of the tape recorder was when it first became available. Our use of the video interview is usually with a composer who had already been interviewed on audiotape. It is considered an adjunct to the oral material just as spoken interviews can add to written documentation. By handling video interviews in this way, the informational material, already covered orally, need not be the prime focus of the video interview. Nor must it be lengthy. It is not necessary to have a camera on an interviewee of many hours, but to do so, choosing the most visually appropriate subject matter, adds immeasurably to the sense of intimacy and understanding of creative figures for future use for example, when we do not have a Copland directly with us. It follows also that if book publication is valid from oral history interviews, high-quality television documentary production can result from video interviews. I have been involved with four such endeavors, and while fraught with enormous difficulties, these productions exist as documents of extraordinary figures, in a very special way. One production is a docudrama one is on Ives another, on ragtime

composer-pianist Eubie Blake. The most recent is on Copland, "A Copland Self Portrait," shown on PBS in the fall of 1985.

Notes

[1] Henry Crowell, ed., *American Composers on American Music* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1933).

[2] Vivian Perlis, *Charles Ives Remembered: An Oral History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

[3] Ibid., p. 224.

[4] lbid., pp. 14-17.

[5] Ibid., p. 112.

[6] Aaron Copland and Vivian Perlis, *Copland: 1900 through 1942* (New York: St. Martin's, 1984), pp. 350-55.

[7] Copland's early life is discussed in Copland. pp. 17-19.

[8] *New Masses* 11(1 May 1934):16-17.

PANEL DISCUSSION 1

Charles T. Morrissey, chair
Barbara A lien
Christopher Crawford
William W. Moss
Vivian Perlis
Eliot Wigginton

CHARLES T. MORRISSEY: We have heard a lot today, and what I hope this panel will do is capitalize on all the informed and very rich commentary you have already heard today and get these people to share more with you upon the occasion of this fifteenth anniversary of oral history at Baylor. Indeed, this is a stellar lineup of very informed, committed, articulate people. And as I was making my notes this morning and this afternoon listening to the speakers, there were so many things that occurred to me to share with you, I'll try to just run through them very quickly.

Vivian just described the finds that somebody would have upstairs in their home, and I had the great delight two or three weeks ago in Houston of going into the subbasement of the Baylor College of Medicine and discovering, unknown to anyone in the institution, 151 cubic feet of lost records going back to the time when Baylor College of Medicine left Dallas in 1943 and moved to Houston, and covering through the period of 1969 when Baylor College of Medicine declared its independence, if you will, from Baylor University. And, indeed, when one makes these discoveries as an oral historian supposedly committed to using tape, I often wonder if we should drop the word *oral* and call ourselves historians because we're finding materials beyond the use of tape recorders which are very basic and essential to reconstructing the history of the individuals or institutions, the places, the regions that we deal with.

We have heard Bill Moss say how oral history is highly individualistic. Barbara Allen objects, I think, to the way Bill Moss equates oral tradition as synonymous with folklore, and perhaps you would like to comment on that. Barbara doesn't like a word that I often use. I refer to people that I interview as *memoirists*; she prefers *narrator*. A memoirist, she implies, is one person writing one account, an autobiography, unlike the two-person, co-created, oral history document.

Vivian Perlis raised for us not only the tape-versus-transcript issue: Which of the two is the basic and more informative document? But then she juxtaposed videotape against audiotape. I don't know if you picked up on it, but in one sentence, even less than that, she touched on a very sensitive matter when she said that preservation is not necessarily the business of the media. I pick up on that because so many people will say to you, if you identify yourself as an oral historian, Oh, you must do what Dan Rather does, or newspaper reporters do, Charles Kuralt does. Are there differences? Indeed, many of us would say there are very basic differences. Vivian said, "No famous man wants to talk about another famous man." Gee, that's a fascinating generalization to

pursue. Or composers don't necessarily articulate their ideas well, something which fascinates me: To what extent can you anticipate ahead of time in an interview how the person will respond to the interview in terms of the person's training, whatever the person's role in life is, and their attitude towards interviewing in general? Now, lawyers supposedly are not supposed to divulge confidential information that is part of the client-attorney relationship, so some of these things are obvious; priests are not supposed to tell what they hear in the confessional.

I'm constantly amazed at how different people out of different backgrounds will respond differently to the interview experience as experience. You will hear us and those who have written books about oral history say, Try to reduce the presence of the tape-recording equipment. Some people are put off by the technology and your rapport may suffer if too much attention is given to a tape recorder. Interviewing former congressmen—let me tell you, they gravitate towards micro phones, just the opposite of that sort of thing. I did an interview last week in Washington with an alumnus of this university and also an alumnus of the Baylor College of Medicine, James Schofield, and he told me after the interview, something that I didn't want to hear. I've tried to develop through the years certain tactics whereby I communicate visually with my respondent. I don't want my voice on that tape recorder necessarily, but I want to be supportive, If a person is telling a difficult story, I want to show that I'm interested-—please go ahead, take all the time you want telling the story—and I try to do it with facial signs, hand signs. There are times when I will deliberately drop my eyes when I feel a person would be more comfortable not having someone stare at him. And after this interview was over, this M.D. from Baylor, this doctor, said to me, "You know, in the interview you dilated your eyes an awful lot."

Barbara Allen mentions how someone else mentioned to her, I think, how Mormon missionaries all tend to structure their narratives of their experiences in the same format. That's kind of an interesting observation. Why should that be so? So I think what we have here in front of us on this table are a lot of differences and a lot of similarities—-back to Bill's point about how oral history is highly individualistic—and if we can get these people to talk about the variety and also the congruence which characterizes the practice of oral history today, I think we'll all be the better for the experience. I'm going to start this simply by asking if any panelist would like to say something which adds to or clarifies, elaborates on anything already said from the stage today. It's your chance to get another time at bat.

WILLIAM W. MOSS: I want to pick up on something else that Vivian said, and that is that oral history is done better when it is without a personal goal or when you don't have your own ax to grind or your own vested interest in it. I happen to agree with that, but I think it's only fair to point out that there are those who disagree with it. At the 1984 Oral History Association meeting we had Joan Hoff-Wilson

speak to us and she said, in effect, that she did not believe that we should give the interviewee the chance to close material, that the interviewee should be faced with the ultimate and imminent publication of the material by somebody else and this keeps him honest. I think that's a point of view that has to be taken into account even though I basically, I think, agree with you that the more disinterested the individual interviewer is in what happens to the thing in the long run, the better.

I want to pick up on something Charlie threw at us, too, Barbara. I'm not sure that you and I were in disagreement on that oral tradition and folklore thing exactly. I know that I'm a little disturbed about it because I think that I did avoid using the term *folklore*, that I used *oral tradition* deliberately because I think I was using something slightly narrower than is generally meant by folklore. I certainly did not mean the usual day-to-day current aphorisms of life, for instance. I did not mean folkcraft. 1 was definitely talking about a historical awareness on the part of an ethnic group rather than of a sort of body of prevailing folk understanding—

BARBARA ALLEN: I think that's right.

MOSS: ——something a little different.

ALLEN: You were talking about folklore that had a historical context to it.

MOSS: Yeah.

ALLEN: Not all folklore does. And it need not also be simply an ethnic group. although you may be using that in a broader sense. But it may be tradition that circulates within any kind of a community——

MOSS: I agree with that.

ALLEN: -—ethnic, regional, religious, whatever it might be. No, I don't think we have a disagreement. I think your point that oral tradition circulates even in literate societies and in highly literate, sophisticated societies is well taken. It's something that brings up a second point that you mentioned the question about disturbing oral tradition by recording it. Oral tradition is going to go on all the time whether it's recorded or not, and the recording situation is simply one more context within which the material is presented.

MOSS: I think what I was touching on there is an issue that often comes up, not only with historians but it comes up in science as well, and that is, what does the mere presence of an observer or recorder do to the quality of the phenomenon that you're recording. And it gets kind of esoteric in terms of epistemology sometimes, but it does something to what the thing——

ALLEN: It's a matter of the effect of the observer upon the observed. And folklorists have found a very neat way around this problem. They argue that either you can do field work, you can do collection by observation, by participating in storytelling sessions in which storytelling is occurring naturally, or they argue that even asking someone about their historical traditions, about family folklore, serves as another kind

of context which is just as natural in a way as any other context, that an informant, a narrator, a memoirist is going to respond according to what that person sees as appropriate in that situation. So each context is going to be different; each response, each telling of the story is going to be different in each context and an oral history interview may be just another such context.

VIVIAN PERLIS: I think another example would be Merle Miller and his use of oral history. 1 feel as though that's certainly closer to a journalistic kind of interviewing than the kind of oral history—the use of material in that way. I remember his saying at an Oral History Association meeting, "I didn't care whether Truman wanted—" I mean, whatever the person says, they should be aware that it's going to be used, that they have no right once they say it to put any restrictions on it whatsoever. Now, that was his attitude there and then you're telling me. in other words, pointing out another example that there are people who feel that if someone agrees to an interview, they should just feel as though that interview is out there and should and can be used any way anybody wants to. To me that's more connected with journalism in use of material than the kind of oral history that we —

MOSS: I think it can also be self-defeating because once somebody is burned on one of these things, it makes it awfully difficult for the next person—

PERLIS: That's right.

MOSS: —to come along and get a decent interview. As a matter of fact, Charlie was saying that congressmen gravitate towards microphones. Well, they do, but they do with a certain set of expectations, and those expectations are that they're going to be on the evening news that night and they're ruddy well not going to say anything that's worth anything because they don't want to be held to it. Obviously, a politician wants to be able to shift his ground tomorrow with the changing times; otherwise he's not going to get reelected, so he doesn't want to be pinned down to anything. And when you go to do a decent oral history with him, it's very, very hard to find a politician who will sit still for a good oral history interview and who will give you something productive. Get the number two person. Get the person who's a staff assistant, and that's where the real gold is. Get the top person for the local color and the voice print or the video print or whatever, but get that staff person as the one who can really tell you the story.

MORRISSEY: Vivian's reference is to a book by Merle Miller entitled *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman*, and I think Miller's point that from a journalistic viewpoint every interviewee should be aware of how the words may take flight and a person has to live with those is quite distinct from what an oral historian does with a person narrator, respondent, or interviewee—who voluntarily chooses to cooperate in the co-creation of a document for history quite distinct from a document for tonight's news or tomorrow morning's newspaper, a very critical distinction.

MOSS: Which leads us back to your earlier question about whether or not you can spot a good interviewee ahead of time. I don't know that you can guarantee it. I think there are some indicators. I think that somebody who has been accustomed to giving a set piece for the press is someone who is not likely to be a good interviewee. When we interviewed Dean Rusk, it was quite clear that he had prepared his answers long, long ago. He had decided to write them out in his own head in well-ordered paragraphs, and that's all we were going to get. I also think that there are people who have committed themselves to a life of writing and to analyzing things in writing. I had one interviewee tell me after he got his interview and sent it back to me, regret that he did not want to do it. He said, "I think oral history is a bad thing. I would much rather be remembered for those things I thought carefully enough about to write down." And I think that kind of person makes a bad interviewee. I think the ones who are good are ones who themselves are articulate, reflective, like to look back at the past and like to think about it, like to figure out what went on back then and who did what to whom and are willing to sit down and jaw with you about it.

ALLEN: I want to comment about Wigginton's presentation. You talked a good deal about the values that cultural journalism, if I can apply that term here, the kinds of projects—-—the oral history projects your students get involved in——the kinds of values that exist outside their values as raw historical data, so to speak.

ELIOT WIGGINTON: Right.

ALLEN: I think there's another value that perhaps you touched on but I'd like to see you elaborate on, and that is the value of establishing the legitimacy of every human being's historical experience. It's a point that you touched on as well, Bill, and something that I want to elaborate on myself later. But I'd like to hear what you have to say about that particular point. To what extent does what your students do help to validate people's experiences, both the students and the interviewees?

WIGGINTON: You know, that's a good point. It's one of the things that I want to get into to a certain extent tomorrow also. You have to understand, I think, the situation. In our part of the country there are a number of people that come to the end of their lives feeling that in many ways they've been basically powerless, and it happens because they've had a history of watching as forces that are stronger and more powerful than they are do things to them on a regular basis. And despite maybe prior attempts to turn some of that around, they realize in reflection, looking back, that they haven't made very many inroads into---- and that's a fairly common experience, not only with a lot of the people that we who work in the southern Appalachian region find, but you also find among many groups of blacks and American Indian groups on reservations. It's basically a sense of frustration and a wondering of what it is they're going to leave behind to mark the fact that they existed at all.

And, although it's not often verbalized to us by many of the people

that we interview, we get thousands of letters that say precisely that. We get letters like the one we got from a lady named Mrs. Queen R. Stone in Milwaukee who said that the Foxfire books were a godsend because she could give copies of those books as a grandmother and give them to her grandchildren and say, "1 know that you all don't live in the mountains any more. I know that we've all been forced to move up here to work in factories, et cetera, but when you read about these people I want you to remember for the rest of your lives that you're reading about yourself. This is you all. This is where you come from. And this is a record that we existed on this earth as southern Appalachian people who were distinctive and important in our own way and had something to say that very few people took the time to listen to." And Aunt Arie said essentially the same thing. Stanley Hicks said essentially the same thing. It's like, We were here; we mattered. And while a lot of people in the outside world may not know that, this can help at least document the fact that we had something to say. And I think that's important stuff.

ALLEN: I had a second question as well and this one is for Vivian. I'm like Bill. I appreciated your saying that doing oral history for a larger purpose than a particular product is a good thing in terms of the kinds of materials that show up when you're not looking for them. Can you elaborate on that point a little bit, particularly drawing from your own experience? To what extent did just simply taking American composers as a subject without any specific goal help enrich your collection?

PERLIS: Well, I would take that in a little different direction. I don't think this is what you mean, but it's a point I'd like to make anyway and then maybe I can come back to your direction. About the Yale project, people will sometimes say to me, Well, what kind of music do you —what kind of composers? I will say, Well, it's American twentieth-century music. It's American partly because we are funded primarily by the National Endowment for the Humanities and so forth, and we have to have some restrictions and all this. I don't feel that twentieth century music has to be American or that the project has to be American. But when they question about this, Are you talking about so-called classical music? Are you talking about folk music? What are you talking about—twentieth-century American music? Where within the framework of classical music do you particularly go, if you like the serial composers or the minimalist composers or the John Cage chance-operation composers? Who do you go out to interview? Who are your first choices on these things? Fortunately, my enthusiasms in music are very broad and there is very little of good music that I don't like; I'm a jazz buff and I love folk music. In directing the project I really try not to make any conscious decisions for or against any kinds of music, in terms of not limiting the kind of material that comes in and not injecting my own taste in terms of, This is the kind of music that I think is going to last and be the music that represents America in this century. So

in that way I look for a very broad range and try to cover as broad a range of music as possible.

And I know that's not what you were asking me. You were asking me in terms of individual interviews, for specific examples of what you can come up with. I know that there are many projects that we've done right now. We do interviews in a fairly structured way even though we try to cover a broad range of material, either chronologically broad or going through an entire life's work piece by piece. And very often things come up that you don't expect. That's quite true. I don't think of specific examples right now.

MORRISSEY: The curse of much oral history in this country is that so much has been done by graduate students writing dissertations, who define *the* universe as *their* universe which consists almost exclusively of the subject they're researching for that massive tome which will win them their credentials. And if you fall into that trap, may I simply suggest something I have found very helpful. Every oral historian should have six fingers on each hand because there are six basic questions you want every respondent to answer: Who did what? When and where? How and why? And if you can open up your focus to get answers to these six in detail with lots of examples and so forth, chances are, I think, that you will avoid the trap of being overly selective, as we all are inevitably, just by being human.

MOSS: There's something else along the same lines, Charlie, and I think oral history is particularly helpful in this. And that is that there is a lot more research that is done these days that is of the "dictionary look- up" variety. You're looking for a specific answer in a specific place through a specific index and if you don't find it, it probably isn't worth looking for. Oral history takes you back to a deeper immersion in the subject that is broadly ranging, that has a lot of associative connections that develop in the research, and that is a very enriching experience and is a much better experience, I think, than a lot of the standard set- piece essays that people are given in graduate school that are of the "look-up" variety.

MORRISSEY: Could I go back to something Wig just touched on and that is how oral history can often be a very dignity-building experience for people who think otherwise; they don't have any history because they think all history is what textbooks focus on: great events, of wars, elections, depressions, and that sort of thing. In fact, I think it's Carl Oblinger in Pennsylvania—-recently moved to Springfield, Illinois—-who has said that many people in coal and industrial towns in Pennsylvania were there trying to find safety and security from the vicissitudes of history. In other words, think in terms of your own family histories. How many families represented in this room today are represented by you in the United States because somebody in your ancestry fled oppression or the draft or religious persecution or poverty in Ireland when the potato famine occurred, whatever it may be, to come to the New World, to escape history? And I think with ethnically centered families,

particularly, there's almost a three-generation cycle whereby grandchildren discover that grandparents lived marvelously exciting lives, but the grandparents thought they were of no historical interest because nobody became rich or famous and achieved the other things by which, unfortunately, in America we tend to measure success. The other side of this, history as a dignifying experience, is, to what extent is oral history exploitative of people? How many people are interviewed and someone runs away with their memories in order to make money publishing or doing TV shows or something else? How many researchers use the materials that turn up in archival institutions, oral history tapes and/or transcripts, and exploit them without being responsible scholars? Would either of you want to go with either of these two, dignity building or exploitation?

ALLEN: I've got something I'd like to say in that regard, and I think that oral history has actually kept its house pretty clean in this regard, primarily because oral historians have consistently paid a lot of attention to ethical considerations of this kind, requiring people to sign legal release forms that specify exactly the purposes to which the material is going to he put. The question that was raised this morning, in order to minimize the impact that equipment might have in a recording situation, do you e record secretly? I am going to stick my neck out and say I wouldn't have much respect for someone who did—

WIGGINTON: Likewise.

ALLEN: —who did not make it very clear to the person who was being interviewed exactly for what purpose the material was going to be used. So I think exploitation by oral historians as oral historians has been kept to a minimum. The second point I want to make about this is that the eagerness that we've talked about with which people greet you when you express an interest in recording their stories is incredibly touching and they don't care if you think you're exploiting them. They may think they're using you to tell their story, in a way.

WIGGINTON: I'd like to respond to that. Can I talk about that for a minute? I think these points are absolutely right. I want to go a little beyond it, though. But one of the reasons that I want to make a stab at responding to it is because of all the oral history projects that exist in the country, we probably catch more suspicion, I guess, in our project because currently the retail value of the books that we've marketed through Doubleday is thirty-nine and a half million dollars. And there are a lot of people out there abroad in the land that say, What are you guys doing with all that money anyway? And we had a couple of pretty violent arguments with people who—one well-known educator in California, for example, who 1 won't mention, says, "Every one of your informants"—and none of our people will let us use the word *informant* because every time I say, "What would you like to be called? Would you like to be called an informant?" They say, No, it sounds like the CIA. But every one of the people that we work with, he asks, "Why don't all of the people that you work with in Rabun County,

Georgia, now live in brick duplexes that you've bought for them? I mean, how can you justify what's happening?"

So it's worth talking about for a second anyway because what do you do if you make some money? Who owns the tapes? Do you own them or the people that gave you the information own them or does some independent organization like a local historical society or a library or an archive or somebody else become the recipient of your work? Do the kids own the tapes? If a kid goes and interviews his or her grandmother, does your classroom project own it or does the kid and his or her family own it? What happens to that information? If you make some money and you're doing more than just simply paying for your magazine and say you want to split it up among the people that you interviewed, well, how do you parcel it out? Does the person who gave you one home remedy get the same amount of money as the person who share three hours worth of information with you? Is that the way it works? Or do you do it by time? It's like X number of dollars per minute or do you have a flat rate, twenty-five dollars per interview? If you do that, as they do in many places, then do you get to the situation where older people only give you bits and pieces of the information so you'll come back five hundred times? Is that going to happen? In other words, how do you figure it out? What happens if you interview somebody, as we did over at Fontana Dam for two days, about bear hunting and building Fontana Dam and all the rest of it? And we began to check the historical facts and realized all of a sudden that virtually 98 percent of what that man had told us was absolutely false and virtually none of it was useful but he gave us two days. And we haven't printed any of it and never will. What about the students who do the interviews? Don't they get some? What if a student is almost incapable of functioning at grade level with language arts and it takes that student six weeks to create a two-page article, struggling over every word, and another student who is a Beta Club kid and functioning at very high levels of skill, creates a thirty-page article in the same period of time? Now, who are you going to give the money to and how much? Do you pay by the page? Do you pay by the amount of effort involved? And the fact that someone like Allison Adams put no effort forth in terms of really having to work that brain in the creation of that thirty-page article versus this kid who struggled for weeks to create a page and a half, they both get the same? That's not right.

Anyway, we evolved this whole system where we explain to the people, first of all, that although the books from Doubleday generate a good bit of money, we only get 6 percent of that for starters—6 to 10 percent in some cases and on a couple of books we get 10 percent. So we get a fraction of that money. Two, we explain that the money is going to go back into the school itself and going to be used right there in the community. Part of the money is going to be used to save the tapes and save the archives and make sure that they're safe for the rest of history. And as far as the students go, the students don't get any money

during the school year, but they get money for scholarship assistance. We give thirty thousand dollars a year in scholarship assistance. We've sent eighty-two kids through college so far, many of whom wouldn't have gone to college otherwise. We have a summer job program that employs twenty-five to thirty students per summer. Chris is an example of that. Chris has worked with us—how many summers?

CHRISTOPHER CRAWFORD: Three summers.

WIGGINTON: Yeah. When did you start working with us?

CRAWFORD: Eighth grade.

WIGGINTON: Eighth grade. And so we can begin to get some of it that way. If contacts need something done, if they need something fixed on their house, if the roof is leaking or whatever, Foxfire will go and put a new roof on their house. But now you've got to be careful, too, because we went to Kenny Runion's house, for example—and here's where it gets complicated. Kenny Runion was a person that we interviewed over and over and over again in Rabun County, and his name is scattered throughout six volumes of the Foxfire series. Kenny's dead now, but at one point in time Kenny's house was almost coming apart and Kenny was living a pretty precarious existence. And so we rebuilt his house---— no charge to Kenny—--get him warm in the winter, get him fixed up. You know what happened as a result of that? Kenny got a nice, warm house, hut he also lost his Social Security; now he's got no income. Now, who's doing what to whom? It took us six months working between Toccoa, Georgia, and Washington, D.C., to get Kenny's Social Security checks coming in again because we tried to help Kenny out.

But within the bounds of what we can do, we do everything we can to repay the people for what they've given us, not only in the fact that we're going to stay here and we're going to be there in that county and we'll help to whatever extent we can; rather than coming in from Minnesota and taking a truckload of tapes back home never to be heard from again, we're there and we're at the other end of that phone seven days a week. All the way through working out things with people when they sign permission slips, like the deal we worked out with Jud Nelson, a wagon builder that's featured in *Foxfire 9*, who said, "The only way that I'm going to give you permission to use all this material you've collected over this six-month period of time, following me through the process of making a wagon step by step, is if you can figure out a way, if *Foxfire 9* does well, to get some of the money back over into our county"— which is not Rabun County----"and help out the kids over here in some way." And he says, "And what I would prefer, if we could work it out, is some kind of a Jud Nelson scholarship at the local high school." So that's all written into the permission slip. And the permission slips says, To the extent that it's possible, if *Foxfire 9* is a success, we will try to establish a scholarship fund in Jud Nelson's name at that high school. We can't promise that that's going to happen, but we are going to make a good-faith effort to make sure it does. Now Jud says, "Good. That's all I want to know. I just want to know that you guys

are going to try." Now he signs the permission slip, and we *will* establish a scholarship fund in that high school over there. I don't know how big it's going to be. Nobody may buy *Foxfire 9*; I don't know.

I think the ground rule is that as long as the people themselves understand that nobody's getting rich and that you're going to treat the material with dignity and that they're going to see it before it gets printed and they're going to have a chance, if they want, to remove a story that they wish in hindsight they hadn't said when they see it in black and white, and that they're not going to be ripped oft and that we're going to be there on the other end of the phone if they need a hand and that there's going to be a continuing relationship that'll exist through time and that we're going to, to the extent that it's possible, do really good things with whatever money gets generated in that we're going to send their grandkids to college and that kind of thing, I think you're clean. But, yeah, if somebody does make a whole lot of money off a book and stick it in their pocket and go to the Bahamas, I think they've earned the wrath of the people that they interviewed. I can't justify that. I can't justify it personally.

MOSS: I'm fully in agreement, Eliot, but I think that in fairness I have to play devil's advocate here a little bit. I'm absolutely, 100 percent in agreement with the positions that have been taken to this point and I don't want anybody to misunderstand what I say now. I think there are a couple of temptations, though, if I can put it that way. One is the Merle Miller one.

WIGGINTON: Yeah, just as I said that, that went through my mind.

MOSS: Merle Miller says, These guys are fair game. They are public figures. They set themselves up for this thing. I don't owe them anything. He knows when I walk in there—

WIGGINTON: Yeah, I was just thinking the same thing.

MOSS: ——that this is the deal. He's not unsophisticated so, therefore, I can walk away and do what I ruddy well please. The other situation is a little more complicated. Let us hypothesize a moment that we have an ethnic group that does not cotton to having its culture tape recorded, for some religious reasons or some clan reasons or whatever, does not want its culture recorded. But the culture is disappearing and there are those among the group who say, We've got to record this, others who say, Absolutely no. Who is in the right here? Is it wrong for the people who want to preserve the culture to go in with the hidden tape recorder and tape record the music, tape record the chants, what have you, so that they will be preserved for that culture?

WIGGINTON: Can I respond to that just for a second?

MOSS: Yeah.

WIGGINTON: I think it's wrong.

MOSS: Right. Good. I agree.

WIGGINTON: Okay, and I think that what you do is, to the extent that it's possible, you bring the people in that culture to the point where they themselves realize the importance of preserving it —

MOSS: Right.
WIGGINTON: —and give them a choice to preserve it in whatever way they themselves want to.
MOSS: That's the answer, If it doesn't come that way, then it ain't worth havin'. I agree.
ALLEN: Let me give you an example of this. It came to me over the weekend from a folklorist friend who has been working at the Library of Congress on the federal cylinder project. The Bureau of American Ethnography in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century engaged in a great deal of recording on cylinders, native American materials, and she is in the process of transcribing and producing recordings of these materials. And she said that very often the people who did the recordings took a very patronizing and condescending attitude, thought that the people who were being recorded really didn't understand all this technology and so forth but felt this kind of pressure to preserve the culture that Bill is talking about. She said when she has been working in the Library of Congress, a month has never gone by that some native American from one of the tribes that has been recorded comes stalking into the library and says, "Grandfather said that one time a man brought a machine and recorded him and said that it would be in the library in Washington, and I want to hear it." She said they produced a record for the Omaha Tribe and took it to an annual meeting of the Omaha and played for them recordings that were made in the 1890s of materials that had not been heard or performed virtually since then. She said the impact on the group was just incredible. People were crying, people were dancing, people were just ecstatic to have this material. But I agree with you as well, that it's got to be done from the perspective of the group itself. It's got to be right with them before it can be done.
MOSS: It may be skulduggery, but I'm glad somebody else was to blame for it.
PERLIS: Could I take this in a slightly different direction? Sometimes you find some resistance to interviewing. I agree with all this, but you shouldn't let things go too easily. Sometimes people will say, No, no, and no, and what they mean is, Well, maybe, or something. One example—-and it's a little bit related to the question you asked me before— when the great French teacher of all the American composers, Nadia Boulanger, was about to be ninety some years ago, I thought, If we have a project in American music, we must have Nadia Boulanger. It would he wonderful to have her on tape. Everybody else talks about Boulanger and what she meant and what a wonderful teacher, and nobody seemed to put their finger on why, the exact quality of this wonderful teacher. Well, the thing to do would be to go and have Boulanger herself on tape for the archive, if possible. So I wrote. And this was right before her ninetieth birthday. She wrote back and said, "Come at seven," on a particular day that it was supposed to be. And people had described to me her pattern of work, which was so intense that she did work

from six in the morning until ten at night. I didn't know whether she meant come at seven in the morning or come at seven at night. But she did say, "Come at seven." And when I got to Paris and I called and an assistant was there and it was determined that it was seven in the evening.

So I went over in this famous apartment that she lived in for seventy- five years. And so many people had described it with the rickety, shaky little elevator, and up into this darkened apartment. Boulanger was then quite ill. She was quite blind and everything was the way that everyone had ever described it, with the organ and the organ pipes and the picture of her father with the black over it and all of that. And she was a tiny little figure sitting in a corner. And this deep voice—-and the first thing she said was, "I cannot speak with you after all. I am ill. I am teaching tomorrow. I am teaching today. I am sorry; I cannot speak with you after all." And I said, thinking I'm not the kind of interviewer that insists or is going to start putting a recorder on no matter what, and so forth—i thought, what in the world do I do now? I'll have to say, Well, I'm sorry you're not feeling well and can I come back? "No, no, I am not good with this kind of thing. I have decided I cannot give—I have nothing to say. Whatever you ask of me, I have nothing to say."

So I said. "Well, I'm very sorry about that and I just want to send you the regards of Aaron Copland. He sends you his love. I just saw him." "Ah! Copland." Well, I did turn the tape recorder on. Permission had been granted in advance! (laughter) I didn't test it out—the voice, anything. "Ah, I remember long ago—" and actually it was on this tape that I have that I didn't have time to play this morning. "Many years ago when Copland came to see me and since then after—--years after years after years, but I cannot talk with you today. I cannot tell you anything." "Well, I'm sorry about that." And I said good-by seven times, but each time I said good-by mentioning another one of her—-Elliott Carter and so forth, and each time, "Ah!" you know. And each time I put the tape recorder on and got-—while I had Boulanger talking. She knew very well that she was—she looked as though she were looking right at me and I knew she was quite blind. I said, "You know that i'm recording this, Mademoiselle." And she said, "You know that I was not going to talk with you today." And I had been thinking, What do you do with somebody like this when you have a very little bit of time and you're trying to get the essence? That's very different than with a lot of time you can spend with someone. How can you possibly get from somebody what the essence of a teacher—what it was that made her mean so much to people without specifics and details, especially saying good-by seven different times?

She said to me, finally, "You know why I am speaking with you after all. I will probably never see you again. I am sick; I am tired; I did not want to do this interview. I am speaking with you because I sense that you are *engager*. You are so interested in what you are

doing that I am interested in what *you* are doing, and this is what I did with my many students." In that one section, the realization that that's what her students felt from her, the fact that she was so interested, if they were. And she said. "You are genuinely so interested in what you are doing." So, anyway, that's a little story about how, even if people— 1 mean you shouldn't, of course—and had she said, Absolutely not, and leave, and that's that, certainly, I should not take advantage when somebody says they are not going to do an interview. And this is a little amusing story about somebody saying that.

MOSS: No, but I think it fulfills the ethical requirement because you and she obviously established a rapport—

PERLIS: If it didn't I wouldn't be telling you about it.

MOSS: — and a consensus and an understanding about the situation. Sometimes it happens the other way, though. I remember one fellow that I interviewed, and it was quite clear from the beginning that this was what we were doing, and I showed him the agreement and all that kind of thing, and we spoke it on the tape and whatever. I had the tape on and he went on and told me all kinds of lovely things. And then when he saw the transcript he said, "My God! I didn't know you had that on." He said, "You were not supposed to have that on when I bid you that." And obviously I had to give it back to him because he wasn't going to stand for it. He was maligning some people. And I think he thought I was safe.

PERLIS: Aren't there times when people will say to you, I will tell you something but please turn the tape recorder off?

MOSS: Yes, and I've been hard pressed--

PERLIS: it's heartbreaking sometimes when you have to do that.

MOSS: It is also interesting the number of times they will tell you to do that and then afterwards say. "Well, I guess that isn't so bad after all; turn it on," you know, "and tape it," because it wasn't as bad as they thought it was.

MORRISSEY: Could I just volunteer a footnote to this, if I may? What I often do in circumstances much like Vivian's is try to anticipate ahead of time what my most important question is if I only get my foot in the door long enough to ask one question. But, surprisingly, after twenty- two, twenty-three years, now, of doing oral history. I have yet to have an interviewee say to me early in our getting acquainted, Mr. Morrissey, w-hat is the most important question that you have to ask me? It's never happened and I can't figure out why. Thirdly, I also don't rehearse but anticipate ahead of time, what is the most rapport-building comment 1 can make trying to build up my rapport and break down the resistance? And you obviously did it by volunteering Aaron Copland's name,

PERLIS: I think it was really somewhat by accident. I wanted to prolong a little conversation, having come all the way to Paris to do this interview. It was a spontaneous kind of a thing.

MORRISSEY: And where a lot of my colleagues in oral history disagree with me, I think on this appropriately ---I have found early in an interview,

if you can embody in a question how much you already know about the subject, your respondent will key off preparation and seriousness about this interview and be much more forthcoming with detailed, candid information.

WIGGINTON: Absolutely.

MORRISSEY: The more you know ahead of time the more you will find out in the interview and the interview is not a substitute for prior research.

May I end this session simply by echoing something that was said earlier today by Eliot Wigginton and that is, with his students this experience of going through oral history often demonstrates that people different from you are not so different from you. 1 hope you feel that way with us here.

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II. THE STATE OF THE CRAFT

INTRODUCTION

In what quickly became known as "Davis's Jeremiad," the symposium's keynote speaker set forth even more clearly than previous presentations some of the factors that distinguish carefully researched and published oral history from that intended to exploit a "history-starved" but unsuspecting public. Cullom Davis represents the mainstream, orthodox view of oral history as it has developed in university research programs, beginning in 1948 at Columbia University. It is not necessary, he asserts, to have a university affiliation or a large program budget to uphold high standards of field interviewing and use of oral memoirs. He offers violators of these standards no clemency. Many oral historians, including some of the previous symposium speakers, fret rightfully over instances of interviewers' straying across disciplinary lines without the proper credentials. Cullom Davis is more concerned about the seductiveness of a marketplace unconcerned with professional research standards and with the damage inflicted on serious oral history by this traffic in memories.

SUCCESS AND EXCESS:
ORAL HISTORY AT HIGH TIDE

Cullom Davis

The combination of an anniversary celebration and a national symposium calls for some stocktaking, inviting us to engage in some reflection and assessment. Mine is a message of both achievement and peril, and therefore of ambivalence. And it occurs amid conspicuous signs that oral history is enjoying unprecedented recognition and use both within the learned professions and throughout popular American culture.

To proclaim the success of oral history is to flirt with a cliché. I nevertheless begin with this proposition both because it has some new dimensions and because it develops the basis for some less obvious but very troublesome concerns. In documenting this success story we can briefly acknowledge the more familiar benchmarks and then explore in greater detail several recent and less obvious signs.

Oral history has all of the earmarks of a robust and mature research craft. It is taught at all educational levels, from elementary school to graduate school. It has developed, adopted, and promulgated a series of ethical and procedural canons that enjoy widespread recognition.[1] It has yielded a rich harvest of contemporary eyewitness memoirs. Aggregate oral history archival holdings in the United States and Great Britain have been conservatively estimated at 2 million pages and 200,000 hours of tape.[2] These recollections from tens of thousands of people have in turn generated a commercial boom in nonfiction book publishing and film production. I will have more to say on this subject later.

Its own professional literature has both expanded generously and matured significantly. An early emphasis on bibliographic, descriptive, and instructional writing has given way to analytical, critical, and historiographic work. This is reflected in both journal articles and books.[3] Its intramural dialogue at professional meetings and gatherings such as the Baylor symposium has evolved beyond the "gee whiz" and "look at me" phases to open debate, peer review, and healthy criticism. It boasts strong professional societies in several countries, and in the United States not only an active national association but also a rapidly growing network of local, state, and regional organizations. It represents conspicuous, if scarcely plentiful, career opportunities for practitioners and apprentices in the field of public history. Its leading archival centers are recognized internationally and across several disciplines, attracting more visitors every year.

Less obvious than the above milestones are several relatively recent developments that demonstrate increasing sophistication and intellectual depth in the work of oral historians. For one thing, our internal differences and debates are much meatier and more consequential than in years past. In the early 1970s, oral historians filled their annual meetings and

coffee breaks with arguments over such issues as elite versus grass-roots inter the tape recording versus the verbatim transcript, and, yes, the cassette versus the reel-to-reel tape recorder. These were lively and necessary debates which helped shape our developing craft, but in retrospect they seem transitory and even trite. They were arguments of tocu and practice, not substance or theory.

Today the dialogue is more seasoned and more thoughtful. Consider, for example, a sobering article by Charles Morrissey on the accuracy and credibility of such celebrated practitioners of our craft as Alex Haley. Studs Terkel, Ronald Blythe, and Theodore Roserigarten.[4] Morrissey raises serious questions about the consequences of applying literary license to oral history interviews.

Another example appeared in the 1984 issue of the *Oral History Review*. Two articles there display striking divergence over the behavior and role of the interviewer. Barbara Allen, who has contributed materially to the proceedings of this symposium, stresses the narrator's unique capacity to re-create the past through free association, thereby relegating the interviewer to a more passive and facilitative function.[5] Arguing the opposite is Alphine Jefferson, whose experience with Duke University's Oral History Program persuaded him that the interviewer's firm control over content and direction is the principal determinant of good oral history. Without it a narrator's account "is only marginal in historical value . . . a recorded exercise in self-validation."[6] These contrasting assertions, based on substantial experience in the fields of folklore and history, challenge all practitioners to think carefully about interviewing style and its substantive consequences.

A second recent development concerns the interdisciplinary nature and potential of oral history. All of us learned long ago that oral history is a hybrid craft. What we know or do about field work, language, human memory, the dynamics of conversation, and converting the spoken word to print depends heavily on the prior or parallel findings and experiences of other disciplines. In the foreign trade of ideas and methods, oral history has been a developing nation, a net importer for many years. We have large intellectual debts to such fields as anthropology and ethnography, folklore, communications theory, psychology and psychiatry, law, library science, and of course history. One need only scan the diverse disciplines represented by the authors in our journals, the speakers at our meetings, and the contributors to our recent anthology, edited by Willa Baum and David Dunaway,[7] to gauge the extent of our hybrid character. Such dependence not only explains our development hut also continues to nourish us. Consider the featured speakers at this symposium--a folklorist, an archivist, an English teacher, a musicologist-biographer, and an historian.

What is new about this phenomenon is some recent evidence of reciprocity. Years of importing appear to be giving way to some intellectual exporting by oral historians. Such a shift in the interdisciplinary trade balance was foreseen and recommended ten years

ago by Ronald Grele. Writing in *American Quarterly*. Grele urged that oral history be the instrument as well as the beneficiary of interdisciplinary research and collaboration. Specialists in anthropology, folklore, linguistics, and literature should, he argued, jointly address the interview as a subject of investigation.[8] Today there are early signs of such cross- fertilization among disciplines which, while different, nevertheless share a common interest in contextual analysis of the spoken word.

For example, at this conference and in their previous writings: Vivian Perlis has demonstrated the interview's service to the field of biography; Eliot Wigginton has suggested models for employing oral history in the national agenda for educational reform; Barbara Allen has noted oral history's potential for enriching the field of American studies and also its relationship with folklore; Bill Moss has analyzed the evidentiary nature of oral history for the enlightenment of archivists and historians.

Further evidence of exporting lies in the fact that oral historians are becoming conspicuous participants at the meetings of other academic professions, in the capacity of invited speakers as well as listeners. They have educated political scientists about the growing corpus of memoirs on Congress and various state legislatures, thereby prompting them to reconsider several established classification schemes regarding political behavior. They have addressed gerontologists and psychiatrists on the intriguing relationship between oral history and life-review therapy for older persons. They have appeared in growing numbers on panels at various historical meetings. They have contributed to the dialogue of professional educators on the classroom uses of oral history. They have enlightened librarians and archivists about the special quality and demands of the oral history medium. These and other signs of cross- fertilization indicate that the oral history hybrid is not only healthy but sufficiently developed to introduce new ideas as well as borrow them.

The Perils of Popularity

So far our attention has narrowly focused on oral history's professional standing—-its achievements and contributions in the learned world of research and intellect. Let us now widen the lens and consider oral history's success in American popular culture, it is my contention that oral history, plus a good many other things that employ or pass for it, is riding a tidal wave of popularity that poses as many perils as it does opportunities for those of us who take the work seriously. The most direct evidence of this trendiness is from the publishing world.

Each week's new book announcements invariably include at least one history or biography based substantially on interviews. The release of some major new book employing our craft is no longer a noteworthy news item among oral historians. In fact, we have trouble keeping up with the rising tide. For years it was the practice in my office to purchase all notable new oral histories for our own reference collection. We can no longer afford this luxury, not because of less money but many more

selections. No topic is too obscure or exotic for the interview treatment between covers. In one recent period publishers invited us to purchase oral history accounts of such diverse subjects as the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood of San Francisco, the luxury liner *Normandie,* and the carving of Mount Rushmore. Moreover, signs point to an even greater supply in the years ahead.

We have access to harbingers of future books in the "Author's Query" items in the *New York Times* and other book-review magazines. If we can assume that today's query will materialize before long in book form, then we can predict that interviews and reminiscences are rapidly becoming the principal raw material of nonfiction. I make it a habit to read these queries, these teasing previews of books to come. Three out of four request anecdotes or recollections about their subject along with letters, photographs, and other information. Some do not even bother seeking print or manuscript materials, just reminiscences. Judging from recent queries, we can anticipate published oral histories of the Battle of Okinawa, W. E. B. DuBois, Princess Grace of Monaco, New York harbor ferries, abstract artist Jackson Pollock, the Peace Corps, and New York Yankees owner George Steinbrenner.

How should we serious practitioners view this fashionableness? Is it evidence of success or of excess? Is it a blessing, for stimulating popular interest in and support for the work that we do? Or is it a curse that gives oral history a bad name, thereby imperiling our efforts to establish recognition and respect? The question is a serious issue for us, but at least for the moment it defies simple or absolute answer. My inclination is to adopt the more pessimistic view, based on several disturbing trends and signs which suggest we may become the victims of a Gresham's law of oral history.

Gresham's law, as many know, is a principle of public finance which predicts that when a nation's money supply is uneven in quality and excessive in quantity, the weakest and worst currency will drive the best out of circulation. In my considered but tentative judgment, good oral history is at some risk of debasement by association in the current climate of popular culture. By "good oral history" I mean interviews conducted by qualified and responsible individuals, who observe the canons of our profession and who view their product as but one form of evidence in explaining the past.

Let me suggest three ominous signs of popular abuse and excess in the use of interviews for dubious historical purposes. For the sake of illustration I refer to them as instant history, vanity history, and sensory history. They are part of the tidal wave that endangers the serious work of oral historians.

Instant history is that rapidly growing bookshelf of best sellers and would-be best sellers that seek to capitalize on the human interest appeal of personal recollections. The quickest and easiest way to write a book these days is to have your narrators write it for you. Pick a lively subject, interview two dozen people about it, do a bit of scissors-and-paste editing,

and, presto, you have a manuscript. Do not waste time incorporating other kinds of information or reconciling divergent memories or digesting and interpreting the stuff; just toss it between covers and offer it to an eager public as another "voices" book.

Yes, this is the age of the voices book. Authors and publishers have discovered the powerful imagery of certain words associated with our craft. One of them is "voices"; others are "memories," "echoes." and "conversations." These words often appear in the titles, subtitles, or advertising copy of instant histories. Beware of them because they are likely to offer nothing more than a collection of undistilled raw material. Here are two recent examples.

Voices from Cooperstown is the retitled paperback version of a 1982 scissors-and-paste hardback called *Baseball for the Love of It*.[9] It consists entirely of entertaining scraps of recollection by members of the Baseball Hall of Fame. This is not history, but a scrapbook, and its subtitle suggests the hype that is characteristic of instant history. Customers are told, "Hall of Famers Tell It Like It Was."

My second example is a 1985 oral biography of Norman Mailer. Peter Manso's *Mailer: His Life and Times* is a fat volume of excerpts from over two hundred interviews, spiced with occasional book reviews and press clippings. This is not true biography but a disorganized chorus of tattletale recollections. Manso acknowledges many contradictions among the narrators, but he chooses to let them all speak without bothering to sort out the discrepancies or interpret his subject's life and work. He defends this negligence with the poppycock assertion that "there is more truth in a montage than a monolith."[10] Contradictory evidence requires analysis and resolution by a responsible biographer; to neglect this task is to offer a scrapbook disguised as biography.

The critical reaction to this book was appropriately devastating. Reviews in *Atlantic Monthly*, *Newsweek*, the *New York Review of Books*, and the *New York Times* justly dismissed it as superficial and mindless: "a great, gluey glob," "a tomb of Pharaonic memorabilia, brick upon brick in the sand," and "the longest gossip column ever assembled."[11]

We would be relieved rather than concerned about such critical attacks on instant history if they stopped there. Unfortunately, however, oral history itself gets tarred by some of these brush strokes. They give serious oral history a bad name, putting our entire craft on the defensive for the excesses of instant history.

Vanity history is a thriving commercial and free-lance industry that appeals to each individual's or family's quest for immortality, Around the country hundreds of interviewers—some qualified and some not—offer their services for a fee to produce family oral histories. Like the county history mugbooks of a century ago, many of these entrepreneurs tacitly promise a sugar-coated life history. One such venture, called Family Archives Publishers, advertised its service in the *New Yorker* as follows:

> THE BEST BOOK YOU'LL EVER READ WILL BE WRITTEN BY YOUR MOTHER. . . . It will be filled with her experience

> and humor as she recounts the stories you loved to hear as a child. You might even learn something new about her past. It will be cherished by you and your children, providing a sense of continuity and intimacy among She doesn't have to be a celebrity to be honored with a published autobiography A Family Archives interviewer will go to her home and in a relaxed and informal atmosphere record the reflections and recollections of a lifetime. We then sensitively edit the interview into a warm and immensely readable volume hound in fine calf leather.[12]

Another enterprising vanity historian offers clients a documentary audio recording, complete with sound effects dubbed in. Thus a grateful family will hear roosters crowing on the tape recording when Grandpa recalls growing up on a farm. Vanity history may seem like a harmless form of huckstering, but it represents a perversion of oral history's purpose. It surely compromises our commitment to honesty and candor.

Sensory history modern America's love affair with experiencing, reenact and sensing the past rather than carefully sifting and studying it. The entire historical profession is affected and perhaps threatened by this cultural phenomenon, but oral history has an especially ambivalent relationship with it. By sensory history I mean the seductive array of places, programs, goods, and services that invite us to explore the past with our senses sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch--rather than our minds. It is everywhere: in our parks and museums, on our television and mo screens, even at our bookstores and weekend events. It entertains and even enthralls us through ingenious scripting, high-tech staging, and irresistible packaging. It appeals to the would-be time traveler in each of us to transcend our temporal boundaries and at least figuratively visit the past as either a spectator or a participant. So pervasive and appealing is sensory history that one authority dubbed it the "American way of history."[13] It is a billion-dollar-plus industry that dwarfs its more studious academic cousin. It takes diverse forms and operates at various points on the continuum between mass education and crass entertainment. Its most familiar variants are the following:

1. The living history interpretive method at outdoor museums and historic sites like Colonial Williamsburg and Old Sturbridge Village. The purpose of living history is to simulate the past through sets, props, and role-playing actors that combine with such verisimilitude, according to one disciple, that the audience can have "a dialogue with the past."[14]
2. Battle and other historical reenactments. Groups like the Society for Creative Anachronism and the National Muzzle Loading Rifle Association stage elaborate weekend reenactments, complete with uniforms, bivouacs, the smell of gunpowder, camp followers, and choreographed skirmishes. One of the biggest ever was at Yorktown in 1981. It took two years of planning and 2.500 participants (or combatants). At the climactic moment there were 180,000 spectators, including Ronald Reagan and

Francois Mitterand, who watched from behind a bulletproof shield. This second Battle of Yorktown, two hundred years after the original, was a spectacular success. Incidentally, the British were defeated.

3. Television docudramas, not to be confused with the many excellent documentaries available. Television has become "a veritable history machine," churning out scores of elaborate re creations of history, quasi-history, and pseudohistory. Each historical docudrama broadcast reaches more people than an entire generation of historians could teach in their lifetimes. Examples of this video genre include *Roots, JFK, Martin Luther King,* and *Christopher Columbus* of docudrama's most successful producers is David Wolper, who explained its impact as follows: "[The docudrama] isn't a book . . . You don't go back and refer to it for information. You see it once and whatever you remember of it stays with you."[15] Thus history through this medium is impressionistic, dramatic, and subject to sensory stimuli.
4. Sensory history has even invaded that last rampart of historians, the bookstore. Now you can browse—if that is the right verb-- for "talking books" and "video books" alongside those old- fashioned relics that have pages of print in them. Talking books are audio cassette renderings of select best sellers. They serve the automobile community and "Walkman" joggers who choose not to spend quality time reading but are happy to listen to the latest author. There are also "Great Books" videos which use the catchy slogan, "Watched Any Great Books Lately?" These are videotapes of Hollywood films based on celebrated novels like *Treasure Island* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Audio and video books are one further example of popular culture's aversion to old-fashioned mental effort and its preference for sensory, experiential, and technological learning.

Sensory history in these and other forms conveys a distinctive brand of historical message. It emphasizes artifacts, personalities, and dramatic moments over content and meaning. It isolates featured events and people from the complex fabric of their particular time and place. It typically offers a homogenized. antiseptic visit to the past, a kind of" happy history" that encourages "good old days" nostalgia. Packaged in sixty-minute films or even daylong tours, it is a fleeting historical excursion, a quick- fix approach to exploring the past.

To the extent that sensory history is becoming the dominant vehicle for popular historical awareness, it raises disturbing questions and prospects. For the oral history movement it has special implications.

In the first place, we owe some of our own popularity and success to it. The same sensory appetites that draw people to the taste of apple butter at a living historical farm or the sight of Cicely Tyson playing Miss Jane Pittman also attract them to the sound of voices telling their

life stories. Good interviews resemble sensory history in the vicarious historical voyage they offer listeners.

But if oral history stops there, content simply to stimulate listeners with folksy dialect or charming anecdotes, then it joins the sensory history fad and surrenders any claim to respect as a medium for truly understanding the past. Memory is not history. It can only be a source of history if it is examined, compared, and interpreted. Therefore, sensory history, including undigested remembrances, is a disturbing trend because it tempts a history-starved public to settle for an effortless fast-food meal. It treats the past as something not to be studied but reconstructed, simulated, eavesdropped, remembered, and reenacted. Therein lies the risk of trivialization rather than the promise of illumination.

Differentiating the Genuine from the Spurious

What are we to make of these three vogues of instant history, vanity history, and sensory history? All are impressive evidence of oral history's natural appeal and intrinsic popularity. Yet each constitutes a dilution or a debasement of the craft and thus a peril to the standards and goals we have striven to establish.

This might be of scant general interest were it not for the specter of Gresham's law. If the Mailer oral biographies and the vanity family histories drive serious archival work out of favor and out of the marketplace, the consequences will be tragic. If university and historical agency executives or foundation officials or practitioners in sister disciplines fail to differentiate the success story of programs like the one we celebrate at this symposium from the excesses of instant, vanity, and sensory history, then we will be in serious trouble.

I have no magic formula to counteract Gresham's law of oral history, but certainly occasions like this symposium are vitally important. We need to celebrate the genuine achievements in our profession. As serious practitioners, whether lay or professional, we must identify the hucksters and charlatans who exploit oral history's intrinsic appeal for their own shallow, a historical and even unethical ends. As teachers and critics we must by example and exhortation help citizens and decision makers differentiate between genuine oral history and its spurious popularizers. Forums like the Baylor symposium are an important means of such dialogue. It is fitting, then, that we meet both to celebrate a milestone for Baylor and to caution our peers of the challenges and perils that lie ahead.

Notes

[1] *Oral History Evaluation Guidelines* (Denton. Tex.: Oral History Association. 1980).

[2] David Henige, *Oral Historiography* (New York: Longman, 1982), p. 108. Some appreciation of the magnitude of these holdings comes from a quick calculation of the work involved in listening to all of the taped interviews currently on deposit. It would require more than 20 years of nonstop listening, 24 hours a day and 365 days a year, to hear it all, by which time probably an equal or even greater backlog would have accumulated.

[3] In recent years both the *Oral History Review* and the *International Journal of Oral History* have featured stimulating critiques and essays. Among the notable books have been Henige, *Oral Historiography*; David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, eds., *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1984); Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Precedent, 1985); Paul Thompson. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Anthony Seldon and Joanna Pappworth, *By Word of Mouth: "Elite" Oral History* (London: Methuen, 1983).

[4] T. Morrissey, "Oral History and the Boundaries of Fiction," *The Public Historian* 7 (Spring l985):41-46.

[5] Barbara Allen, "Re-creating the Past: The Narrator's Perspective in Oral History," *Oral History Review* 12 (1984):1-12.

[6] Alphine W. Jefferson, "Echoes for the South: The History and Methodology of the Duke University Oral History Program, 1972-1982," *Oral History Review* 12 (1984):53, 54.

[7] See note 3 above.

[8] Ronald J. Grele, "A Surmisable Variety: Oral History and Interdisciplinary," *American Quarterly* 27 (August 1 975):275-95.

[9] Anthony J. Connor, *Voices from Cooperstown: Baseball's Hall of Earners Tell It Like It Was* (New York: Macmillan, 1982).

[10] Peter Manso, *Mailer: His Life and Times* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985), p. 690.

[11] Anthony Burgess, "The Prisoner of Fame," *Atlantic Monthly*, June 1985, 100-101, 104; "The Longest Gossip Column," *Newsweek*, 10 June 1985, 79-80; Barbara Goldsmith, "Lion in a Kaleidoscope," *New York Times Book Review*, 19 May 1985, 9; Elizabeth Hardwick, "The Teller and the Tape," *New York Review of Books*, 30 May 1985, 3-4.

[12] *New Yorker*, 21 September 1981, 123.

[13] Jay Anderson, *Time Machines: The World of Living History* (Nashville, Tenn.: American Association for State and Local History, 1984), p. 33.

[14] Ibid., p. 79.

[15] Eric Breitbart, "From the Panorama to the Docudrama: Notes on the Visualization of History," *Radical History Review* 25 (1981): 117, 119.

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III. PERSPECTIVES ON ORAL HISTORY: THREE CASE STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

Barbara Allen, Eliot Wigginton, and Vivian Perlis now take the discussion to a deeper level within their respective professions of folklore, secondary education, and musicology. Each looks at the contributions these three fields make to understandings of life, especially in the United States. Allen and Perlis have a particular interest in the field of American studies because of teaching assignments in such programs on the university level. Wigginton concentrates on young people's educational experiences that are the foundations of such studies. All three focus on the role of oral history as it is or could be practiced within their disciplines to enrich the common understanding of American culture and the educational level of the population at large.

Perlis's second paper was a university distinguished lecture delivered on the afternoon of the second day of the symposium, not as part of the actual conference. A large number of symposium participants heard the presentation. For that reason, and because of the parallels between it and the tasks Allen and Wigginton accomplished in their second papers, Perlis's paper on musicology has been included in this section on implications for related disciplines of the practice of oral history.

TALKING ABOUT THE AMERICAN PAST: ORAL HISTORY AND AMERICAN STUDIES

Barbara Allen

The mission of American studies is an ambitious one: to understand the American experience as a unified whole. Although American studies as a recognized field is relatively new in academic circles—dating back to the 1930s—it is grounded in a very old assumption: Americans' experience as a people is radically different from that of other peoples in other parts of the world, and the uniqueness of that experience has produced a distinctively American culture. Committed to interpreting the American experience and the culture it has produced from a holistic perspective, American studies scholars draw upon a variety of disciplinary perspectives in the humanities and social sciences, including those of anthropology, history, literature, political science, folklore, sociology, art, and popular culture.

Keeping American Studies Honest

What contribution can oral history make to this endeavor? As a method of gathering information about the past from living memory, oral history has become a standard research tool for many American historians. But, oddly enough, American studies scholars as a group have not yet incorporated it into their methodological repertoire. The chief reason for this seems to be that American studies is primarily concerned with identifying and interpreting large-scale themes and patterns in American life. Works by David Potter on the relation of abundance to the American national character, by Henry Nash Smith on the American West as an American symbol, and by Leo Marx on technology and American culture are classic examples of this thrust of American studies scholarship.[1] Americanists, in other words, tend to paint with a broad brush. Because oral history necessarily deals with experience on the individual and the local rather than the national level, its applicability to American studies scholarship may seem to be limited. But the level at which oral history is conducted need not be a serious obstacle to its making a significant contribution to American studies. In fact, it affords Americanists the opportunity to discover solid evidential ground on which to build their broadly conceived edifices. Oral history, in short, can help keep American studies honest. It can do so in at least five ways:

1. Oral history can broaden the base of information from which the American experience can be studied.
2. It can extend that data base back in time.
3. It can provide a fresh perspective on the American experience by describing it from the participants' point of view.
4. It can establish connections between individual and local experience and the national scene.

5. It can legitimize the historical and cultural experiences of all segments of the population.

The first two contributions of oral history to American studies are closely related: (1) Oral history can broaden the base of information from which the American experience can be studied, and (2) It can extend that broadened scope into the past. The first of these is perhaps so obvious as to need no explanation. After all, historical documents are literally created in the oral history interview, making available information about the past that often exists nowhere else and thus inevitably expanding the data base from which researchers can work. Such expansion can take place in several directions. One is by crossing traditional disciplinary lines. That is, oral history can be used not just to explore standard topics of historical research but also to illuminate our understanding of various forms of cultural expression. Vivian Perlis has admirably demonstrated this point by using oral history in her biographies of American musicians. And folklorists regularly use oral history in documenting various aspects of American folk culture, from traditional crafts to ethnic communities to outstanding musical or verbal artists or performers. Examples include Americo Paredes's documentation of a Texas border ballad, *"With His Pistol in His Hand"*; John Vlach's study of a Charleston, South Carolina, blacksmith; and—from my own fieldwork—the storytelling of Floyd Johnson of Yazoo County, Mississippi.[2]

In 1979-80 1 spent nine months in Mississippi as a humanities scholar- in-residence, working out of the public library. I got involved in doing oral history as part of my responsibilities there.[3] Someone I met told me that I really ought to go talk to Mr. Johnson, that he was a great storyteller. So I found my way down to the southern part of the county where Mr. Johnson lived, off a gravel road. I was fresh from California at this point; I had never lived anywhere else and here I was in rural Mississippi. I pulled up in front of his house with my little tape recorder, went up and knocked on his door. He didn't exactly know I was coming because he didn't have a telephone. I had sent word by oral tradition that I was coming to visit him. So I walked in and sat down and, sure enough, he was a great storyteller.

He talked about the Depression, how hard times were. He said he remembered going into the grocery store and trading animal skins for goods that he wanted, a sack of flour or a sack of meal. One time he gave the storekeeper four coonskins for whatever goods it was that he was getting and apparently the storekeeper thought he didn't need to pay him quite that much. So, Mr. Johnson said, he gave him three possum skins and an ax handle for change.

My favorite story was about the moonshine whiskey people made in that part of the country during the Depression. Some of it was good whiskey; some of it was pretty bad, according to Mr. Johnson. He said one day he was walking down the road and all of a sudden a fellow stepped out of the bushes and held a gun on him. He had a jug in

one hand and handed it to Mr. Johnson, holding the gun on him all the time, and said, "Here, drink," So Mr. Johnson tilted it back and took a swig, and he said it was pretty bad stuff. After he had finished drinking he handed the jug back to the other fellow and the fellow handed him the gun and said, "Here, now you hold it on me while *I* drink."

A second direction in which oral history can extend our knowledge of American life is by exploring unknown territory, that is, elements of the American experience for which no other forms of historical evidence exist. Again my example comes from my oral history work in Yazoo City. About halfway through my tenure there I heard reference to something called the Afro Hospital. I discovered that in 1928 a black businessman and a black doctor had collaborated to build a hospital for black people in Yazoo City, who, of course, at that point were not allowed to use the white facilities. It was called the Afro-American Hospital and was in operation for close to forty years, owned and run by black people for black people, until pressure began to build in the community for the white hospital to be integrated. When that happened, the clientele for the Afro Hospital began to decline and eventually the hospital was closed and the building was sold. It is now used as a furniture warehouse.

I became very interested in this institution and began asking about it, looking for materials about it, and discovered that in the Bicentennial history of the county which was published in 1976 there was no mention of the hospital. I went down to Jackson, Mississippi, to the state hospital administration agency, and was told that when the hospital closed they pitched out all the records. There was literally no earthly documentation of this hospital in the form of historical records—with one wonderful exception. I was interviewed by the Jackson newspaper about what 1 was doing and I happened to mention the Afro Hospital in the course of the interview. I got a call a few days later from a man in Jackson who said that a couple of years earlier he and some friends had been in Yazoo City doing photography and had explored around an old building where they had come upon some old books rotting and falling apart in the corner of the building. It turned out that they were the hospital patient ledgers, just a couple of volumes from the thirties. He wanted to know if I was interested in them; he would be willing to hand them over if I would protect his anonymity. So I put on my trenchcoat and my sunglasses and I went down to Jackson to rendezvous with him and pick up the materials. After gloating over them for a week, I turned them over to the state archives. But those ledgers are the only historical documentation that exists of that hospital.

I finally ended up interviewing about a dozen people who had been associated with the Afro Hospital, including the head nurse—they had had a training school for nurses in association with the hospital—nephews and nieces of the black doctor who had helped establish it, the children of the other co-founder, the last administrator, the last medical director.

Those materials are on deposit in the Yazoo City Public Library. None of that information would exist were it not for oral history.

Oral history can also extend our knowledge beyond the bounds of standard sources of historical information in a third direction, by documenting the experiences of individuals who represent a full spectrum of American society, from foot soldiers to generals, from assembly-line workers to industrialists, from parishioners to priests, from farm women to agricultural scientists. This ability of oral history to "democratize" the historical record seems to have received more attention than any other facet of oral history, perhaps due—at least in part—to the enormous popularity of Studs Terkel's compilations of oral reminiscences from a broad range of people on a variety of topics. Some have described oral history, in fact, as the ideal medium through which hitherto inarticulate members of American society—the "little" people who don't show up in the history books, such as blacks, Hispanics, and other ethnic minorities; women; blue-collar workers and the like—can tell their own stories. This strikes me as an odd way of looking at oral history because, frankly, I have yet to meet an inarticulate narrator or one who has no sense of the significance of his or her own experience. I prefer to think of oral history not as a tool to redress the imbalances of the historical distribution of power but rather as a means of filling in the very real gaps that exist in the record of the American experience, gaps which are as much products of cultural as of political disenfranchisement. I will return to this point later.

The second way in which oral history can broaden our knowledge of the American experience is by extending the retrieval of oral historical information back in time. On the surface, this sounds like a strange, even silly statement. After all, the purpose of any historical research method is to gather information about the past. Furthermore, oral history is usually regarded as limited to the scope of narrators' personal memories and therefore as more appropriately applied to the recent rather than the distant past. But if we consider memories to be built from transmitted knowledge as well as personal experience, then information about various aspects of American life in the past century as well as this one can also emerge from oral history. In other words, oral history can not only broaden our knowledge of the range of American experiences in the present but also add a dimension of generational depth to that knowledge. The best-known demonstration of this capability is Alex Haley's *Roots*, which was based on oral family history transmitted in fragmentary form through several generations. Nearly as dramatic is the oral testimony that Lynwood Montell and I have recorded from ninety-five-year-old Sara Jane Koger of Jamestown, Tennessee. Her personal memories, of course, reach back to the turn of the twentieth century, but her knowledge of the past also includes what she learned from her father, who was born in 1825. Her generational memory thus spans nearly two full centuries.[4]

Just as the first two contributions of oral history to American studies

are related, so are the next two: Oral history can provide an experiential perspective on American life by revealing what the past felt like to live through, and it can establish connections between the local and the national levels of experience. I'd like to illustrate these points with a specific example drawn from my own fieldwork on early twentieth-century homesteading in southeastern Oregon.[5] I had set out to investigate how people in a small community talked about local history. I was interested in this because of my experience with Sid Morrison, whom I talked about in my earlier presentation. He was a master storyteller and recounted local history in narrative form. I thought that if one person does this, maybe everyone does so. I formed the hypothesis that people would talk about local history in narrative form. That was what I set out to prove. (Once in the field, I learned within the first week how wrong I was, but I was still interested in the way people talked about the past.)

The study area I chose—primarily because I had a sister living there who could introduce me around—was a small ranching and farming community in northern Lake County, Oregon, about forty miles east of the Cascade Mountains and a hundred miles north of the California line. Because the Cascades, which divide the state roughly in half, act as a rain shadow, the eastern part of Oregon is very much like the Great Plains.[6] It's much drier than the western part of the state. The Silver Lake-Christmas Lake-Fort Rock Valley—the study area—is very dry, averaging about nine inches of rainfall a year, and is very high in elevation, about 4,300 feet above sea level. There are approximately six hundred people living within this fifteen-hundred-square-mile area. Before I went out there, of course, I went to the library to see what had been written about the area. I sat in the Oregon State Library in Salem for three days, scrounging everything I could lay my hands on that had to do with northern Lake County, and discovering very little. I remember how discouraged I was, thinking that nothing had ever happened there and that people were not going to be able to talk about anything. The only events that seemed of any significance at all were the Christmas Eve fire in Silver Lake that had killed a quarter of the population and a classic Western range war in 1904 between the cattlemen and the sheepmen. Thousands of sheep had been stampeded off cliffs and killed, and a man had been murdered. It all seemed very exciting and dramatic. So when I set off for the study area itself, I expected to hear people talk about those two events because those were the things that had shown up in the written sources about the area. Again, I was wrong. People talked about the fire, of course. People mentioned the range war, although they were somewhat reluctant to discuss that topic, probably because I was an outsider to the community and perhaps they didn't want to convey the impression that this was a rough place.

What they *did* want to talk about, however, was the homesteading that had taken place there between 1905 and 1915. In all the reading I had done, that had totally escaped my attention. But that's what they

wanted to talk about. When I finished doing my interviewing, I went back and counted up the topics people had talked about and discovered that they spent most of the time talking about the homesteading. The time period that they had spent most of the time talking about was also, not surprisingly, the homesteading era. This really puzzled me, for two reasons: First, the events that I had read about seemed far more exciting, far more dramatic, seemed to afford much richer material for people to talk about. Second, the homesteading effort had been a terrible failure. Not only was there very little rainfall, but the area's high elevation meant that the frost could come any time of the year, and did. One woman told me that when her father's crop froze out on the Fourth of July, he gave up and relinquished his homestead claim to his uncle. People went out there to try to raise wheat, which was impossible, given the environmental conditions. So they just "starved out," in the narrators' words, and began moving out around 1915. This made the emphasis on homesteading doubly puzzling to me. Why in the world would people in this area talk about something that was a failure? it's obviously not a point of historical pride. What I eventually came to realize was that people were presenting to me what the community's history looked like from the insider's point of view. It didn't match at all with my point of view, but it seemed to have a greater validity than mine. After all, the people who told me about the area's past had lived through it themselves or had heard about it from those who had, in fact, a good number of the people that I talked to were children or grandchildren of homesteaders. (Obviously, not all of them had failed; a few people had managed to hang on.)

I talked to two sisters in their early eighties, Josephine and Alice Godon, who had come to the valley from Philadelphia with their father and mother and three older sisters. The father was a chef, born in France, who was working in a hotel in Philadelphia when he saw advertising for this wonderful land out in Oregon. And he picked up, moved the whole family to Oregon, with no farming experience whatsoever. Josephine Godon said the railroads had advertised the valley as "wonderful wheat country." She said, "We came out here and expected to be able to pick up gold off the ground and fruit off the trees. And we're still hunting!" Like most of the other men who moved out there, Peter Godon had to work away from home to support his family; he took jobs as a chef in San Francisco and Reno and other places and sent money back to the family while his wife and the girls kept the homestead going.

The people I talked to expressed what it was like to live through this particular experience. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that from the perspective of the people who lived in the valley now, an emphasis on homesteading as the most important thing that ever happened there is appropriate for a couple of reasons. First, the area itself is still relatively undeveloped because electricity did not come in until the midfifties. Without electricity, there was no way of pumping

water for irrigation systems, which are absolutely essential to grow anything there. So by emphasizing the homesteading, which was a failure, residents can account for the present. They can say, We're the way we are now because things didn't work out so well in the past. There's a second factor at work here as well: By stressing how hard things were for the homesteaders, the people who live there now promote themselves in a way because they're living there now; they've survived; their families survived those terrible times. It's as though they're saying, Look how tough we are; look what kind of people it takes to live here; we've made it.

The Insider's Perspective

It seems to me that one of the strongest contributions that oral history can make is to give us this perspective from the inside, to tell us what history was like to live through. Every oral history interviewer knows this feeling. Not only can oral history provide us with an insider's perspective on the past but it can also show us how a national experience manifests itself on the local level. The Oregon homesteading experience was an isolated area, what William Faulkner called "a postage stamp piece of ground," a very tiny segment of the American experience. In addition to trying to find out why people would want to try to homestead in such a forbidding place, I wanted to make a connection between what had happened out there in the desert in 1910 and the broader sweep of American history. I wanted to put this experience in a national perspective. Through research I discovered that there was twentieth century homesteading in other places in the American West: Nevada, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, Arizona, New Mexico, and the high plains of Texas, particularly after the Enlarged Homestead Act of l909.[7] I discovered interesting parallels as well with earlier homesteading efforts, especially on the Great Plains.

Still not satisfied with the perspective I had developed, I began looking at descriptions of what America was like at the turn of the century. Americans had been told that the frontier was over and there was no more land; therefore, announcements by the government that the remaining parts of the public domain were open to homesteading produced a kind of acquisitive hysteria associated with the end of the frontier. In addition, land prices had risen after agricultural prices recovered from the great depression of 1893. If you wanted farm land and didn't have much money, then taking land from the public domain was your best bet. Also, prices for agricultural commodities were high as well, so it looked as though you could turn a good profit raising wheat. Finally, the American economy was shifting from an agricultural to an industrial base, and Americans didn't really want to give up the thought of themselves as a farmer nation, and some were eager to continue that life style.

Once I recognized these factors at work on a national level, I would

look back to the homesteaders on the Oregon desert and look at how all of these factors worked out on a local level. Thus the oral history that present-day residents of the valley shared with me speaks, to some extent, of the experiences of thousands of people all over the West in the early twentieth century. So oral history can help make a connection between the local and the national levels of experience.

It is the ability of oral history to document and illuminate individual and local experiences that allows it to make its final contribution to American studies: It establishes the legitimacy of all forms of historical experience and of the cultural expressions to which they give rise, regardless of the scale at which they take place or the number or kinds of people involved. I do not believe one can sincerely engage in oral history research and not come to recognize and respect the value of the experiences that people share. This point was brought home to me when Lynwood and I visited Myles Horton of the Highlander Folk School near Newmarket, Tennessee. We were there to interview him about his role and the role of the school in the unionization of local coal mining operations. The overall goal of the Highlander Folk School, he told us, was to help the working people of the upland South to gain control over their own economic destinies in the face of outside entrepreneurial intervention. One of the first things that Myles Horton did toward that end was to encourage local people to write out their life histories or to recount them orally to the Highlander staff. In spite of what they might have been told in the public schools, he told them, their personal historical experiences were as valid as any recorded in the history books. He was right, of course. There is no legitimate rationale for regarding the historical experiences of the members of the Massachusetts Bay Colony as having more intrinsic worth than those of the blacks in Yazoo City or the mountain people of East Tennessee or the homesteaders on the Oregon desert. Nor is it intellectually defensible to regard the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne or Mark Twain as truer forms of cultural expression than the tall tales of Floyd Johnson of Yazoo County, Mississippi, or the local legends of Sara Jane Koger of Jamestown, Tennessee. Historians may pass judgment on the significance of different historical experiences, just as literary scholars may weight the aesthetic merits of various forms of cultural expression. But the validity of those experiences and expressions of experience cannot be impugned.

Allowing the Many to Speak

I have strong feelings about this point because I believe that the thrust of American studies scholarship to focus on broad themes and patterns has worked to undercut the legitimacy, and therefore vitiate the meaning, of historical experiences and cultural expressions that do not exist on a national scale or within a “great” (i.e., elite or literate) tradition. The contributions to American studies that oral history can make are indispensable as correctives to this tendency to allow the few to speak

for the many, and the whole to stand for its many parts. On the other side of the coin, the linking of American studies and oral history can also keep oral history honest by preventing its degeneration into a series of unrelated, microscopic studies that have no connection to a larger pattern. Oral history, in other words, like folklore studies, affords us, as researchers, the opportunity to make American studies truly the study of the experiences of all Americans.

Notes

[1] David Potter, *People of Plenty: Economic Abundance and the American Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American Land as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

[2] Americo Paredes, "*With His Pistol in His Hand" A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1958); John Michael Vlach, *Charleston Blacksmith: The Work of Philip Simmons* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1981).

[3] The oral history interviews I conducted are on deposit in the Yazoo City Public Library. The scholar-in-residence program was sponsored by the Mississippi Committee for the Humanities.

[4] The interviews conducted with Mrs. Koger are on deposit in the Folklife and Oral History Archive at Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

[5] That fieldwork formed the basis for my doctoral dissertation, "Talking about the Past: A Folkloristic Study of Orally Communicated History," UCLA, 1980. Transcriptions of the tapes are on deposit in the library of the University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon.

[6] The homesteading in the Fort Rock Valley is the subject of my *Homesteading the High Desert* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987).

[7] The rationale behind the Enlarged Homestead Act was that the land was so poor, settlers should be allowed to take up twice as much as had been allowed under the original Homestead Act. Along with the availability of large amounts of land, even land of poor quality, the development of a technique called dryland farming around the turn of the century helped lure people to the Oregon desert. Though the dryland method—cultivation without irrigation—worked in some areas of the arid West and continues in modern use, a popular, and unfounded, belief spurred the optimism of the Oregon homesteaders. They moved out at the beginning of a wet weather cycle which lasted only a few years, but long enough to validate, so they thought, a popular belief that arose

on the Great Plains in the 1870s that "rain follows the plow." It was thought by many that simply plowing up the sod would draw moisture from the sky. I found this belief at work in the Silver Lake area.

FOXFIRE AND THE EDUCATIONAL MAINSTREAM

Eliot Wigginton
with Christopher Crawford

I've been asked to talk from a pretty narrow focus, picking up where Barbara Allen left off with how American studies itself as a course of study can be enriched by the use of oral history——picking up on that but extending it downward into the high-school level, specifically about how this kind of activity fits within the curriculum of the traditional public-school system. And I mean traditional public schools now; I'm not talking about an alternative school. I'm not talking about a school within a school. I'm not talking about an after-school program. I'm talking about the activities that we all are interested in as an integral part of the curriculum in service to the curriculum.

In order to set the stage you have to try to remember your own high schools, especially if you went to a traditional public high school. And you have to try to remember what it was like. You have to remember, if you can, what it was like to be thirteen and fourteen, fifteen years old. You have to remember how energetic you were. I think one of the remarkable things about being thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, right in that age span, is how good you feel. I mean, you just feel great! And aside from certain kinds of psychological hassles that you run into during that period of time, you're just full of energy. You have to remember what it was like to go into that classroom and sit down in one of those chairs that had been assigned to you, all in rows, with thirty or thirty- five other kids. You have to remember that textbook you had, that teacher that stood at the back for homework and/or went over the homework assignment by going through the material paragraph by paragraph that you had read the night before. You have to remember that undercurrent of energy that was going on all at the same time, and you have to remember the little tricks that those teachers used in the service of control. For example, they called on you to answer a question while you were talking to one of your neighbors, knowing that you wouldn't know the answer. It's a trick that all teachers have. It's a way to get you to shut up, but it's also a way of successfully embarrassing you in front of thirty-three other folks. You have to remember that sinking sense of loss of some of those precious years, that sinking sense that very little that you were doing inside that classroom was ever going to be useful outside that classroom. You have to remember that question that all of us had when we were in high school that we articulated behind our eyeballs, but never out loud, to every teacher, almost, that we ever had, that goes something like, "Why are you making us sit here and do this?" You have to remember what it was like to come up for air after fifty or fifty-five minutes.

Now try to remember what it was like to realize that you had just

finished first period and you had five more to go. And you have to remember the sinking sensation that you felt when one of your classmates reminded you that it was just Monday.

Look at preachers. I was really amused when I started teaching in Rahun County because all of us in this little school where I worked for the first eleven years in my career had to go to church, and we had to go to church three times a week. It was as conservative a school system as they come. And I can remember with some amusement sitting and looking at the other classroom teachers about fifteen minutes into the sermon beginning to look out the windows and beginning to look at their watches and beginning to scratch and stretch and twist in their seats. Preachers know that; preachers aren't stupid. That's why when you come into church, right, you stand up and you sit down and somebody passes a plate and somebody stands up and sings a song and then you stand up and do a responsive reading and sit down and then you do something else. There's all this activity going on. Remember, church is the same time span as a regular high-school classroom period, and if the sermon lasts longer than about fifteen minutes every preacher that's worth his salt knows he's going to be lynched at the front door as people go out. They won't tolerate it if it lasts more than twenty; you know that. And you know also the sense of relief that you feel, despite all the activity that was going on inside that building, when the sermon finally comes to an end and they've done the last choir piece and you burst out into the sunlight and jump in the car and head for home to get out of that damn tie and shirt and get your shoes off and put your feet up and have a beer and watch the football game.

You've got to remember what it was like to be thirteen years old and have five more of those things to go before freedom maybe tutoring after school on top of that and then your parents making you do homework instead of letting you watch the television set. All for what? That's the question. These kids are sitting there asking themselves:
For what is this? You've got the idea. Teachers persist in that methodology, knowing full well that 95 percent of the material that they're delivering to those kids is going to be forgotten instantly, and still they persist. They know that for a fact. They've got the quizzes and the tests to prove it, and still they persist.

Misconceptions about Foxfire

I want to jump now into a few misconceptions. There's a misconception that a Foxfire-type project is a magazine. Not true. A Foxfire-type project, in fact, could be any number of activities that teachers and students engage in together in the service of the academic agenda, but that put that academic agenda to work somehow in the real world. In our own particular project, for example, only about 8 percent of what we do is the production of *FoxFire* magazine. We're also involved with our kids in the production of slide-tape shows, videotape and television shows

that are broadcast daily over the local cable TV system, the production of radio shows, the production of record albums and cassette tapes that are marketed nationally, performance kinds of situations where kids draw on what they know about their own native folktale traditions and create their own folktales and then take those to the elementary schools and act them out in front of the kids to help the little elementary school kids begin to get their feet wet in terms of traditional tale telling; drama, like the *Foxfire* play with Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy and the development of that script and a whole host of other activities that would take longer than we've got together to list. There's an end product, but the end products differ and the process is the important thing, the process by which those end products are created.

Misconception number two is that it's an alternative to the curriculum. And teachers constantly come up to me and say, "I still don't understand how kids learn about comma splices." All right, this is not an alternative to the curriculum. The basic skills are not ignored. If it's done correctly, it turns into a better delivery system *for* the basic skills and *for* the state's agenda, not an alternative to it.

The third misconception: Projects like this can only exist in the Appalachian region because that's where people know ghost stories. There is abundant evidence to the contrary in the form of hundreds and hundreds of similar kinds of projects, many of which have done work that's far more spectacular than ours. There are lots of examples of this kind of work right in your own back yards and it's crazy for you to write me letters asking questions about how to do it when you've got people like Lincoln King of Gary, Texas, for example, sitting right over there, who, with his students, produces *Loblolly* magazine and recently produced this book out of Texas Monthly Press with a second edition of this book coming off the press simultaneous to the Texas Sesquicentennial celebration. Lincoln knows as much about doing this kind of work as I do and he's homefolks; he's right here; tap him. It's all the way from projects of this sort that are clearly not in Appalachia to all sorts of urban projects that fit the philosophy perfectly, to projects in foreign countries, one of the most interesting of which is a project by a woman named Paula Palmer who went to Costa Rica to teach. She and her students in the Bribri Indian tribe discovered that there was virtually no sense of self-identity, no recognition on the part of the country of Costa Rica that those people even existed. And just like people in the Appalachian region they had been exploited for their natural resources they had forever. And in an article in a newsletter we publish for teachers called *Hands On*, she says, "The idea for an oral history project at Talamanca's agricultural high school took shape during 1980. We are indebted to the high school students of Rabun Gap, Georgia, who publish *Foxfire* magazine. . . . *Foxfire* provided the model which the people of Talamanca adapted to their own situation."[1] And that's the key phrase. Take an idea, adapt it to your own particular situation, tailor-make it to your own clientele. When you're up against problems

or have questions, don't ask me; ask your kids: How are we going to figure this out? "Our idea was to teach students oral research skills and photography, take them to interview local residents, and then use that research to tell Talamanca's story by publishing a magazine." What happened eventually was, over the course of two or three years with these little kids, they produced a series of magazines which became a book. And the ministry of education for the country was so impressed that the ministry reprinted that book as a social-studies textbook and distributed it to every high school in the country of Costa Rica. And now the textbook that the kids use as part of their social studies program is a text written by kids for kids about who we are and where we fit in the scheme of things. It's way beyond what we've done.

American Education under Scrutiny

We've got to look at what's happened to us today. We've got to remember that there are at this time something like thirty-nine commissioned reports. all of them one of them—critical of the public high-school system. The most recent one came out from American business. The commission reports, by and large, are thoughtful. By and large, I think, the commission reports make recommendations that are on target. The states have heard the earlier of those commission reports, most notably "A Nation at Risk" and some of those that spearheaded the effort. And they have decided in their wisdom that in answer to the charge presented, what they have to do is concentrate on competency tests. Ours in Georgia is called the BST. All of our lesson plans have been recoded to the BST. The students have to pass that test before graduation, and if they don't, they get a certificate of attendance instead of a diploma. Teachers are undergoing the same testing program. There's a lot of paranoia about those tests because the scores are published in the newspapers. And so you look and see where Rabun County rated in relation to the kids in Habersham County or White County or those counties. And when the principal sees our standards slipping, our test scores slipping, he will say, in a teacher's meeting, "I want us to beat Habersham County next year. Now, let's get at it! Here are the areas where our kids are deficient."

So the end result of all that is knee-jerk response to these commission reports, which becomes this flood tide of new workbooks, new textbooks, and new rules like the ten-day rule, which say we don't want the kids missing any more than ten days per school year off school campus in school-related activities like debate trips, exchange programs, field trips, or trips like this one. Chris Crawford lost three days out of his ten to come to this symposium early in October. He's only got seven left. The intent is to get the kids' noses back in those textbooks, hold them in class and stop this baloney; let's get back to business.

Aside from the incredible amount of paranoia that that creates, there's another problem that arises. It's a problem hinted at by Ed Meade,

who, in a speech made in Boston at the Educational Writers' Association on March 23 of this year, said, "I've read the recent reports about schools, some twenty-five or thirty of them, depending on what you include. Many of them argue, to use my term, that we have deintellectualized the schools. The reports recommend that students should not only acquire knowledge but also and more importantly that students learn how to think critically, to be analytical. to solve problems, to be adaptable. These reports seek students whose heads are not just full of knowledge but who are able to *use* knowledge." In other words, what's happening now is that with the emphasis on basic-skills tests, teachers are concentrating on that as *the* main item on the plate. That's the agenda, to get those test scores up.

What's wrong with that? It looks great on paper. What's wrong with that is an analogy that I've used already in telling people about this, and that is that you can know that one of the questions on the BST test is going to have to do with the parts of a bicycle. You can teach the students the parts of a bicycle. And when the state test comes out those kids will score very high, maybe even make perfect scores, and be able to name all the parts. But that accomplishment, unfortunately, has no correlation whatsoever with the student's ability to get on a bicycle and ride it. You can know the parts of speech. You can be able to find comma splices you can know all the bits and pieces of information that are necessary to pass that basic skills test. That's a snap! But being able to write an essay, being able to use language with any confidence has no correlation with the acquisition of those bits and pieces of information at all.

What's happening here is that these commission reports are coming out and explaining what the problems are with the school systems. And the states are hearing that and, to a state, are misinterpreting the message and thinking that the way to address what the commission reports are telling us is by this method. And they're wrong. One published by the National institute of Education, *The Report of the Commission on Reading*, is titled *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. And one of its most highlighted conclusions reads:

> … it is a mistake to suppose that instruction in grammar transfers readily to the actual uses of language. This may be the explanation for the fact that experiments over the last fifty years have shown negligible improvement in the quality of student writing as a result of grammar instruction. Research suggests that the finer points of writing, such as punctuation and subject-verb agreement, are learned best while students are engaged in extended writing that has the purpose of communicating a message to an audience. Notice that no communicative purpose is served when children are asked to identify on a worksheet the parts of speech or the proper use of *shall* and *will*.
>
> Skillful teachers find ways to give children reasons to communicate to real audiences.[2]

That's the primary conclusion of the report *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. But what is happening now is that all the BST tests and all of the skills tests that the states are pushing on us are running absolutely contrary to what fifty years of research shows us about how kids learn and what things stick. Now, in the face of that, maybe the production of a magazine like *Foxfire* snaps into a little clearer focus in the service of an agenda where you're concerned about young people's ability to communicate with other folks.

State Guidelines and Foxfire Methods

But how do you do it? In order to do it, as a teacher, you have to look at the state guidelines themselves, and you have to remind yourself not to fall into that old trap that tells you that these guidelines and these skills can only be acquired by the use of the state-mandated workbooks and tests. You have to remind yourself that, in fact, they can be acquired in a number of ways and in far more powerful fashion, in fact, than workbooks and texts, if you just get smart. So with writing skills, for example, in the service of grammar instruction, students write essays constantly in the Foxfire I and Foxfire II classes. Those essays eventually find their way into publication. These are conversations with older people. These are introductions to an article about someone who may be a grandmother or a grandfather. I take those essays home and grade them and I give them a grade for content and a grade for grammar. After I'm finished grading those essays, I go through them and I lift sentences from every essay that contain grammatical mistakes that I don't ever want to see on kids' papers again: comma splices, subject- verb agreement problems, incomplete sentences, whatever they happen to be. I type all those up on sheets and then I make copies of those sheets. When I hand the papers back the next day in class, I also hand out those grammar sheets. There's another sheet that has examples of good sentences, solid construction, nice use of language and use of words. Those sheets go out to everybody. We use them instead of using the textbook, which we leave on the shelf. A grammar book at this point is useless. The kids have done that whole thing of memorizing the parts of speech for ten years now. They're immune to any instruction there.

Now what you do is you concentrate on the writing that the kids are doing and concentrate on places where they're obviously having problems. Every student has a manila folder. In the front of that manila folder is a chart. Across the top of that chart is the number of every composition they're going to write. Down the left-hand margin is a listing of every mechanical or grammatical mistake that you're going to jump on and the number of numerical points that you're going to take off every time the student makes one of those mistakes: three points for every spelling error, five points for every subject-verb agreement, fifteen points for every fragment, all the way down the line. And that grammar grade is a numerical grade that's a subtraction of all those points from

a hundred. Sometimes it's a negative score. So be it! Minus 125? Minus 125.

You keep track of that chart. And when the papers go back, the kids chart how many times they made each of the mistakes and what the points got taken off for. On the inside of each kid's folder, three or four weeks into the semester, you take a look and you see whether or not you're getting anywhere. You take all the students that are still having problems with subject-verb agreement, pick them out and take them to a back table and say, "Look, you guys." While the other kids are working on something else, transcriptions of interviews, whatever, you say, "Let's fix this subject-verb agreement thing for the rest of our lives so we'll never have to worry about it again." And we sit down and just go at that for forty-five minutes until it's done. But you have to be smart. You take the creation of a product like the magazine and you use that as a motivational vehicle to make kids willing to go through the pain of fixing whatever it is that needs to be fixed and say, Okay, I understand *now*, for the first time in my life, why this is important.

I had a student in the eleventh grade not too long ago who persisted in starting sentences with a lower case letter. He'd never gotten into his mind that you had to start them with a capital. You've got to remember what high school is like. I've got kids that can't spell the most important things in their life. They can't spell *driver's license*. And I said. "Look! I'm just curious about something. Why didn't you learn to start sentences with a capital letter? What happened there?" And the kid said, "I don't know. I must have heard it before, but until now it didn't make any difference. I won't do it again. I understand. I've got it." With writing skills, if you just get smart you don't fight the state's agenda and say, You're wrong. You say, Okay, I give up! You win. I accept your agenda. Fine, no problem. Just don't tell me how to do it, and allow me to address that agenda in ways that I know are sound pedagogy, and don't force me into a methodology that I know is bankrupt.[3]

Let me read through several of the BST skills that kids are supposed to have in reading in Georgia. As I read through these BST skills, see if you can't imagine how an oral history project could address those *head-on*.

BST 1: *Students will be able to tell the difference between fact and opinion*. That one's so obvious it doesn't need any elaboration.

BST 2: *Students will be able to read and reproduce or explain the explicitly stated main ideas of what they read, details, sequences of events.* My kids have transcriptions of their interviews. And often the things that people tell those kids are all out of sequence and all garbled. What the students have to do is index all the pieces of that transcription and everything that has to do with one subject or one time period gets a certain letter or a certain number: A, B. When somebody returns to that time period or that particular activity or whatever it was, it's the same letter. And you take a copy of that transcription and cut all that up and put all the As together in one pile and all the Bs and all the

Cs. And each one of those goes into a folder and you know what they all are. Then you order the folders and put them into some kind of appropriate sequence because people talk funny; they jump around; they careen through time.

BST 3: *The student interprets instructions*. In numerous instances not only do students have to create instructions that help people see how a traditional skill was done, but they also have to interpret my instructions, as I help them understand how a camera or a tape recorder works or how an interview is done, and they have to interpret the instructions of other people as they are explaining things to them. We do all kinds of exercises in which a kid will create a set of instructions for doing something and we'll pass them on to the other students and say, Now, you guys do this and let's see what we have when it comes out at the end.

BST 4: *Understand relationships of words. Be able to create a definition of a word from its context*. You're talking to someone like Granny Toothman and she's talking about the first glass of dandelion wine she ever had and how she drank that glass of wine, and all of a sudden she knew it was hitting her and she was sitting there in a chair. And when they called her in to dinner she was afraid to get up and walk and so she scooted the chair into the dining room and sat there with her head swimming. When she says, "Boys, I's really juberous," a kid can look at the context and understand the meaning of the word *juberous*. We can have a lot of cases where that happens.

BST 5: *The student understands figurative language*. When the student sees a simile, the student knows that that is not the literal meaning, that somebody wasn't actually as mean as a striped snake. This just means they were mean. It didn't mean they had scales on their stomach. That's important for kids to understand that, which the state apparently doesn't think they do. But, no problem. I accept that. I've got it. Let's take a transcription and identify all the uses of figurative language. Let's identify the metaphors in songs like "Harbor of Love," gospel songs. Let's pick out the most powerful examples of figurative language and list them. Let's have the class vote on which of those would be the most powerful title for the article for this piece from Aunt Arie or from somebody else. Let's use some of these as a caption for some of your photographs where you pick out an appropriate piece of figurative language to put underneath that photograph and set it off.

BST 6*: The student can locate information in reference materials*. In preparation for doing an interview, what kinds of work do students do in the library to get set up to ask good, competent questions? If you look at a project like a *Foxfire* magazine, suddenly you see that rather than being an alternative to the agenda or fighting the agenda or contradicting what the state tells you to do, activities of this sort address that agenda *exactly*. And if you'll be smart about pre- and post- testing your kids to document the fact that they are, in fact, acquiring these competencies, you'll find that they're doing a hundred percent better

in their class than the kids down the hall whose teachers are handing out worksheets that say, Which of these sentences is true and which is false?

The best part about it is that you can accomplish the state agenda, but you go way beyond it simultaneously into a whole host of other kinds of benefits for the kids that are involved. That's the best part. And I'm not going to go into any detail here at all. That's all in *Sometimes a Shining Moment*. But what we have to be smart about, as teachers, is remembering what John Dewey told us in 1890 and 1900. John Dewey foretold what's happening to us now in the clearest language that's ever been put on paper in a book called *Experience in Education*, copyrighted in 1937 and reprinted now by Collier Books, still available. He told us what was going to happen in the 1960s with our alternative schools. He told us what was going to happen in the 1980s with BST tests. And what he outlines in that book, as have many people since and before Dewey, is the logical sequence of activities that take place as learning is acquired by kids.

Let me paraphrase all that and turn it slightly two degrees, again with a project like a *Foxfire* magazine or a television show in mind: First, with students, you identify a project that you could do that the community would value. *Foxfire* magazine is such a project. That's why there are copies beside the sewing machines in the shirt factory. There's a real-world component because the community is involved; that creates the intrinsic motivation necessary for a kid to want to acquire the academic skills that have to be acquired to produce that product. The students helped choose that project. Second, they gain the acquisition of some of the skills necessary to produce that. They gain skills such as making notes in an interview situation, writing an introduction, writing a good description using all five senses, doing an interview, asking good questions, taking photographs. Third, you move into the action component and the application of those skills. Kids in an interview situation make notes about what they observe about the person's environment so that when they get back into class they can write a good description of that environment that'll set that person in context and make that interview sing. They're the eyes and the ears and the noses and the hands for the reader.

Fourth, you move into a reflection period when you say as a group, Okay, what happened to us yesterday? Did it work, or did it not work? Who screwed up? Who did something right? Where did we get things backwards? How do we improve? And the students themselves, out of that action component, out of that situation, begin to understand those skills that they still don't quite have yet and those pieces of the puzzle that they've really got to work on and struggle with and get up to speed. So you go to a higher level of skills acquisition and then back to an action component where they put those skills to work again at a higher level, and then back to a period of reflection where you say, Okay, now where are we? You're constantly moving not in a circle around

and around and around but in a spiral of ever-higher competence, until you get the kids to the point where you help them realize that now what we've got is not the production of a magazine as a be-all and an end-all in itself and as the logical consequence or conclusion of our activity together, but what you've got is a magazine as a gauze curtain that you pierce and go through. It's the production of the magazine that's the catalyst for the acquisition of skills that now can be applied in higher and more sophisticated ways that may have nothing to do with magazine production *at all*.

You put a magazine out with a group of students and now you've got to sit them down in the classroom and say. So what? So you can do an interview. So what? So you can transcribe a tape. So you can write an introduction. So what'? What's all that stuff for? What's it used for out there? How else can it be put to use, or in what other context? What does being able to do a good interview with a person have to do with a parallel skill of interviewing somebody for a job when you're an employer or being interviewed by someone? Where else does this stuff surface'? Now that you know these things, how else can they be applied? And you see the magazine not as a concrete product and as the conclusion or the consequence of all that activity; this is just a vehicle. It's just a shell of a locust. What gets left behind is just that hollow shell. It's a nice product. The community values it. It was fun to put together, but it's over here, and the cicada is gone. What Dewey reminded us of was the necessity of that constant ebb and flow between action and reflection and constantly analyzing where you are and why you're doing what you're doing and what it's leading to in terms of competencies and insights that you never had before. And now where are we going?

Teachers and students need to work together as a team. There's a mixture in a class of small-group activity and coming back together for discussions as a large group, as a whole. There's a mixture of the passive and active use of time. There's the situation that inevitably occurs when you encounter problems. Here's where most public high-school teachers get screwed up and the reason they get screwed up is that they weren't taught the right way to be teachers. What they see when they come up against problems, things like copyright or budget or a bad interview is an almost insurmountable obstacle instead of looking at a problem as being one of those magical opportunities where you say to the kids, 1 don't know what happened, but I'm a little older than you and I know some places to get some information that maybe you're not familiar with yet, and I think what we'd better do together is go and find the answers because we sure don't want this to happen again. The teachers and the students together learn how to solve problems and the teacher becomes a learner just like the students and the class is infused with a new kind of energy that wasn't there before when that teacher just lectured out of that text. Suddenly you're partners and you're grappling together to figure out solutions for things that you've got to

solve in the service of the production of this thing that's bigger than all of you. It is, in fact, good that teachers *don't* know all there is to know about doing this kind of thing because it sets up a potentially magical situation.[4]

Why is all that important? Well, the commission report that I mentioned earlier done for American businesses is summarized in the issue of *Education Week* of September 11, 1985. One of the conclusions that all these businesses came to was that schools were ignoring, in the face of this new agenda, the very skills that they as businesspeople valued most highly in the workplace. One of the paragraphs from the summary of this report says, "Schools should demand higher standards of behavior from their students, and they should institute policies and practices that encourage students to develop such positive traits as self-discipline, reliability, and perseverance. Improving this 'invisible curriculum' should be just as important as upgrading instruction in basic academic skills."[5] What businesses value is the ability to be creative problem solvers, the ability to work as a team, the ability to make yourself push on through a task and get it finished, the ability to continue to learn whenever you come up against something you don't know how to do. And all those skills, obviously, in the hands of a teacher who is sensitive and smart, are serviced by the creation of a project like a magazine or a television show or whatever else it is you're doing together. In the service of this agenda, once more, almost any kind of activity or project is acceptable and you can't get hung up on the idea that Foxfire is a magazine.

Now I want Chris Crawford to show you how it fits, and then I'll conclude.

A Foxfire Student's Perspective: Christopher Crawford

I got into the Foxfire program in the seventh grade. In the past I have taken four Foxfire classes which consist of two Foxfire I classes and one Foxfire II class, a video class. Presently I am taking three Foxfire classes this semester, so I'm really stacking up on them. I'm taking the radio class and the Foxfire II class again and the music class in which I'm learning how to play the guitar to become a musician one day. The Foxfire II class is the class that produces the magazines. And my first time in Foxfire, fellow students and I interviewed four people. I would like to mention them to you. Kyle Bowlin, a retired John Deere salesman near Oak Ridge, Tennessee: He had a special love for children, and he wanted to share it with them. So he made a ten-car wooden train. Each car was about the standard size of a little red wagon. And it was pulled by a John Deere tractor because he was a John Deere salesman. And each car was painted green and yellow. He took these ideas, and he loved making toys for the children and everything.

We got interested in the CCC camps of the United States that President Roosevelt had. And what made us so interested is that in our American history textbooks at the high school there is just this much about the C(camps: "One of Roosevelt's most ingenious pet projects was the Civilian Conservation Corps. The idea was to provide 250,000 unemployed young men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five with useful work in the healthful outdoors. They would conserve the nation's natural resources in national parks and forests by planting trees, stocking fish in lakes and rivers, building fire lanes and wilderness trails. The CCC would also restore the historic sites of Revolutionary and Civil War battles." What they left out was the letters, the Depression, enrollment of the camps, the specific jobs, food, mess hail, recreation, free time, education, punishment, accidents, and a final analysis. Bill Southards and Alton Storey were two people I interviewed about the CCC. They are both retired men of Rabun County. (Alton passed away back about a year ago.) And they joined the CCC during the Depression to help their families out. They were paid twenty-five dollars a month! And they would keep five dollars and send the twenty home to their families. And they worked on the roads of Rabun County and some of the state parks in Georgia.

Another man is real interesting. His name is Henry Harrison Mayes. He's a retired coal miner in Kentucky, just over the Cumberland Gap. And he was in a coal mining accident when he was a young man, and he promised God, if God would let him live he would devote his life to God and he would try to reach people through making signs. And he erected these huge concrete structures and wooden signs to put on highways all over the United States. As a matter of fact, we have a sign in Rabun County that says, "Get Right With God," just right around the curve: you go around the curve and it's right there! He had a heart attack in 1975 and he couldn't lift these signs after the heart attack. He couldn't put them up. So he thought he had to think of something else to do, so he started getting these little Coke bottles and getting a piece of paper to put around in them and throwing them in the rivers and oceans to get his message out. He really wanted to get it out there.

The English part of the class is when we would come back with the tape and sit down, transcribe it, make the sentences correct, punctuate and edit the article, getting it ready for the layout and sending it off to the printer. Learning more than English, I learned special things like the love Kyle Bowlin had for children. It's so wonderful. He shared it with us as we were interviewing him. He was really excited because that train was a toy he played with whenever he was young. He said he'd get up on the mountains and just ride them down. That's the only thing they had—-wooden-wheel trains. And Bill Southards's mountain stories, talking about the good times they had in the CCC, the games they played, like the softball teams in the camps and everything, meeting people-—they just loved it. And Henry Mayes, devoting his life to God, making signs with his own money, no help from anybody but friends

that helped him put the signs up. It's people like them that make mc glad that I'm a part of southern Appalachia.[6]

Conclusion: Eliot Wigginton

There are the academic lessons and the basic skills that get covered. Our kids have been evaluated so many times that I've lost count. We've had four Ph.D. theses to date and more probably coming, one of the studies of which lasted for a year. All the studies show that the kids gain at least as much as, and in many cases far more than, their counterparts in the academic skills themselves. I have so many records that if anybody from the department of education of the State of Georgia comes into my classroom and says, I want to see what's going on in here, I can bury that son of a gun.

Part of the agenda has to be that the teachers have to be smart about having that kind of documentation and those kinds of records. One of the reasons so many Foxfire projects have gone out of existence is that teachers don't take the care to make sure, one, that they serve the agenda, and, two, that they're perceived by the power structure as being solid, well-thought-out, workable, successful delivery vehicles for that agenda. And people constantly see these projects as being somehow odd hangers-on. They're like hobos on this freight train of academia that somehow don't belong in there and you need to get them out of that baggage car.

But on top of all that, there are other things that can be demonstrated that students acquire in terms of the values and lessons that I was talking about in my first presentation, which I won't reiterate: self-confidence, self-esteem, the ability to work in a team, getting things squared away like this kind of thing where now, thanks to your kindness, Chris doesn't have to be afraid of giving a talk any more. That's over. That's done now. We can move on to something else. What you're concentrating on as a teacher is the act of trying to add a whole human being to society, someone who, while he or she is still in high school, gets in his or her head the idea that there's a contribution that can be made even at a young age. There are hundreds of examples of this kind of thing that I could share.

One of the things that was really eating on the father and the grandfather of one of my students a couple of years ago was the fact that a man named Colonel J. F. Gray, during the Depression, in order to give people jobs, had, out of his own money, hired some forty to forty-five community men to dig a road from Highway 441 all the way to the top of Black Rock Mountain for the establishment of a state park, which still exists today and is one of the jewels in the crown of the Georgia state park system. And when the state park was created, the road was named Talmadge Trail for Herman Talmadge, then governor, and the implication that tourists get when they ride past that is that Herman Talmadge also paid for the road to be built when, in fact, J. F. Gray paid these

men to work with mules and picks and shovels and slip pans to grade and create that road by hand all the way to the top of the mountain. Some of the people that were involved in that crew, one of whom was the father of one of my kids, were furious at that. It had been something that had been eating on him for years.

So Kim, as his project, took up this whole issue of the Black Rock Road to correct the record, as it were. He interviewed people that were relatives of. F. Gray, who has long since passed on. His father cooperated with him to find the group photographs of the men in the camps and the tents that they lived in. Then he got together all the survivors for a group portrait that was printed right beside the original so you see the guys as they were then and who's left today, match them up. It also generated a drive to put a suitable tombstone on J. F. Gray's grave, which up until that point in time, for thirty years, had been marked only with a little aluminum undertaker's tag. And I think that kid went out of high school feeling that, rather than having been a victim of this eternal situation where people are always doing things to kids, that he had had a chance to make a contribution that was important to him and to the community. He became a valued individual in the adult world. He proved that he could operate at adult competency.

One quotation from Harold Howe, former commissioner of education, in a speech he gave at the University of Vermont where he cites numerous major reform studies that have pointed "to the isolation that our society imposes on teen-agers by giving them little contact with adults except in the high schools where they are supposed to stay and behave themselves until the adult world is ready to accept them after graduation as people who can do something useful. Rather than growing in maturity because they are valued by the adult world, they perpetuate their immaturity in a teen-age society." And one of the values of projects of this sort is that you can finally break kids through that wall and make some things happen in their lives that correct just this flaw.

One last example and I'll conclude. One of the tricks that we have to be careful about, that we have to get smart about as public-school teachers, is how to deal with our own egos vis-à-vis our students and how to set aside our own egos to allow students to take on tasks that we could do far more easily. This is one of the real flaws in a *Foxfire* magazine project or any end product. Teachers know how to do many of these things and they constantly want to put their hands on that stuff. They see these kids about to take a picture and they know it's going to be a bad picture and they want to grab that camera out of that kid's hand and take the picture themselves or they want to assign the task for taking pictures to students that already know how and consequently rob the other kids in the class of the opportunity to learn through that process. They always give the jobs to be done to people that already know how to do them, forgetting the fact that it's only in doing jobs you don't know how to do that you learn and grow. We have to fight that constantly, and even those of us who are aware of

all that sometimes fall in the trap. This last story gives a good example of that.

For the first five years of the *Foxfire* books, a professional photographer was sent by Doubleday down to Georgia to take the color photographs that wrap around the hard-cover editions of those volumes they're beautiful photographs. One of our former students came back to work for me after he graduated from college. (Several of my staff members are former students that I've brought back.) And he said, "You know, the fact that John Hill comes down with his stainless steel suitcases and his camera bodies and his filters and tripods and lenses and all the paraphernalia of the photographer and takes these photographs makes a liar out of you when you go out and talk to people about the fact that students are involved in every phase of the project." And he says, "I think we ought to fix this." And I said, "God! That's right. I never thought of that." Doubleday had told us for years that they were the ones who knew how to get those photographs and do that packaging that would make people want to pick up one of those books in a bookstore and look at it and say, Ah, I think I'll take this home, and that the students could do the contents of the books but Doubleday had to have control over the packaging. I had agreed with that.

So we worked out a thing with the art director where we could have a contest and any students that wanted to participate could take color transparencies for the cover and we'd send those transparencies to the art director coded so that nobody would know who the students were except the person that held the master list. And he'd go through them and if he could find a slide that he could use, he'd use it, and if not, then John Hill would come down through the Atlanta airport with his two aluminum suitcases and his camera bodies. So for *Foxfire* 6 we used that system and sent about forty transparencies up to New York. And the art director found one that he could use, and he called me up and I asked what the number was and he told me. And I looked on the master list and it turned out that the transparency had been taken by Carol Rogers, who had had five weeks of instruction in one of our photography classes, took the photograph with a little Honeywell K1000 Pentax camera, no filters, tripods, shutter releases, fancy paraphernalia.

When the book came out, the consensus at Doubleday and in the art department and with the editors and everyone else was that it was the best-looking cover on the series to date. Two weeks later, Carol was with me on the "Today Show" being interviewed by Tom Brokaw with her photograph blown up behind her as a backdrop. And we had insisted that if they could find a transparency taken by one of the students that they could use, that they pay that student the same fee that they paid John Hill for his photographs. Carol took the check that she got from Doubleday and bought her first camera, and now she's a junior at the University of Georgia majoring in photojournalism.

What we have to keep reminding ourselves as teachers is the fact

that we have the power to make that happen in kids' lives. We have the power to change kids' lives, and a project like one of these projects is ideally suited for that purpose because it has the capacity to put kids in So many situations where they get stretched and where they have to grow and where they have to think about what they're doing and where they have to think about who they are and where they fit in the real world. That's why projects of this sort capture my affection and my attention. It's why I've been in it for twenty years and why I have no intention of leaving.

NOTES

[1] Paula Palmer. "Self-history and Self-identify in Talamanca, Costa Rica." *Hands On: Newsletter for Cultural Journalism* 7 (Spring l985):8.

[2] U.S. Department of Education, National Institute of Education, *Becoming a Nation of Readers: The Report of the Commission on Reading* (Washington, D.C.: 1985), p. 80.

[3] Lots of the skills that students put to work in the service of research projects they do for the magazine are exactly the kinds of things they're going to be asked to do when they get to college with the added component that rather than simply going to the library and copying sections out of the encyclopedia and footnoting those and handing them in, they're also adding first-person narrative to the existing written record which, I think, is a skill that should serve them well when they get to college, also. I also teach a separate college English course that's just for seniors and it's a duplicate of the 101 course they would get if they went to the University of Georgia, and that takes care of the essay component. I don't teach Shakespeare any more, although I would enjoy the opportunity. But I've already got five classes a day and I can't do any more than that. I teach a literature course, but it's all Appalachian literature.

The students who go through the college English class read a good hit of literature, not Shakespeare, but we read routinely things like the "Love Song of .J. Alfred Prufrock," by T. S. Eliot, and analyze that closely and write essays about it and compare Prufrock to "Richard Corey." We do that kind of work, absolutely.

The nice thing about being a teacher and staying in one community for a period of time is that you get all this feedback from former students. When my kids who were in college English go roaring through 101 and come back on vacation, I get them into my class to talk to my current 101 students. They tell me exactly where the parallels are between what they did in high school and what things the kids I have at that point in time need to pay attention to: You're going to meet a teacher named So and So. and here's what she's going to make you do and you'd

better be ready.

[4] I think there are probably a lot of reasons that schools of education haven't employed Foxfire-type projects. I don't mean to imply that they're unresponsive; that would leave you with the wrong impression. I teach a couple of graduate-level courses in methodology during the summers, one at North Georgia College, in Dahionega, and one in Berea College, in Kentucky, and I was invited by those schools of education to do that. And I'm there as part of their faculty. But in terms of actually integrating, one of the variables is that the students you've got in schools of education don't have the experience base that they need to be able to relate a lot of that philosophy and methodology to what they're going to face when they get into the classroom. So even when schools are doing it, most of it's not being internalized in the same way information in our high schools isn't being internalized because the kids don't have the experience base to relate it to. That's part of it. Part of it is that it's hard to help teachers understand exactly how a curriculum gets put together using this particular experiential, community-based philosophy. It's fairly complicated, and it takes a couple of years' worth of practice to be able to see where you can begin to insert. Part of it is just schools of education themselves, and in a lot of those schools there is a faculty that hasn't done this kind of education before, by and large, so they don't know how to teach it. There are a lot of variables, a lot of reasons.

Teachers go out of those schools of education with a lot of techniques and with a lot of ideas for things they want to try, but they haven't taught for three or four years, and so the experience base isn't there that allows them to really integrate those techniques and that philosophy fully into the approach they're going to take once they get to school. And they get there and see those 150 kids and all those good ideas and all that preparation just go right out the window when you're faced with the reality of all those squirming thirteen or fourteen or fifteen year olds. Then the main agenda becomes, How am I going to keep these kids from running over me?

[5] Committee for Economic Development, "Investing in Our Children," *Education Week* 5 (11 September 1985):l7.

[6] Two *Foxfire* issues took a stab at completing the record on the CCC: Vol. 16, no. 4 (Winter 1982) and Vol. 17, no. I (Spring 1983). They're a good example of how in our approach not only language arts gets served but also the social studies curriculum.

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PERSPECTIVES ON TWENTIETH-CENTURY AMERICAN MUSIC

Vivian Perlis

In music, as in everything else, nothing is so permanent as change. This has always been a truism, but when describing twentieth-century music, we are faced first and foremost with the rapidity of change as compared with the past when dramatic changes of musical style came only after long intervals—as long as a period of one hundred years. But after 1900, the pace speeded up to intervals of only twenty or thirty years.

The most violent of these changes, of course, was the revolution in the arts that took place in the teens and twenties—-that explosion of traditional values when it was announced to the world that tonality was dead, as was diatonic melody, repetition, and the forms music had taken for centuries. The rules of the past were overthrown and the movement for modern music was viewed as a crusade against tradition and conservatism. The concept of an avant-garde was new; it was fresh and it was exciting. Stravinsky and Schoenberg, or Schoenberg and Stravinsky, whichever your preference, were the leading figures, with styles then considered irreconcilable. The music world lined up behind one or the other of these musical giants. Before long, the new radicalism took hold, wrote its own rules, and became established. Words such as *atonal, dodecaphonic, serial, twelve-tone, aleatoric*, and *chance operations* entered the musical vocabulary. An American national consciousness finally began to develop in the arts—the "Affirm America" movement of photographer Alfred Stieglitz and the nationalist writings of Walt Whitman and Hart Crane. Music, although behind the other arts, began to strive for what Aaron Copland has described as "an American sound." He said, "The French had a music that was characteristically French; the German music had a German sound. Why not try to develop a kind of music that sounded typically American?"

During the thirties and forties, with the Great Depression and the threat of Nazism and war, the social, political, and economic forces combined to swing the pendulum back to a more accessible music. In this country, it was Copland who took the lead in creating a series of clear, communicative works, some for ballet and film, that led modern music out of its isolation ward and into the domain of everyday human life. Nevertheless, his works and those of others who took a similar path (Ginastera, Chavez, Britten, Milhaud, to name a few) were composed in the so-called modern idiom which was obviously here to stay. This populist-humanist phase did not last long either. Again, it was outside forces that change the atmosphere and led composers to a hermetic, more intellectual state of mind. The Cold War and particularly McCarthyism crushed socialist ideals of a music for the people. New music became either highly academic or technological; electronic and

computer composition had entered the scene.

An article by Milton Babbitt, "Who Cares if you Listen?" has been frequently misquoted out of context (as Babbitt is quick to point out), because it so aptly describes the shift to an introverted, exclusive attitude adopted by many composers.[1] On the other hand, and concurrently, the concept of multimedia events and the first "happenings" were initiated by those such as John Cage, who were influenced by the permissiveness of the sixties and by Zen Buddhism. Within a short time, reaction again set in: In the early seventies, composer Jacob Druckman announced that he and his colleagues wanted to reach a broader public; by the midseventies the seeds of two differing styles, the broadly based "New Romanticism" and the narrower-ranged "Minimalism" had been planted and were growing alongside each other. They heralded a headlong rush back to tonality.

Most surprising of all, "cross-over" hybrids sprouted—musical styles that mixed elements of popular culture with classical music. Frank Zappa, Philip Glass, and Anthony Davis, to name a few, drew their music and their audiences from both sides of the fence—pop, rock, jazz, and classical—unheard of in American music where these elements have been deemed unmixable, like oil and water. An interesting phenomenon has thus occurred: Although each succeeding style change seemed to be a reaction against and a replacement for the previous one, none was totally displaced. Instead, they have stockpiled, so that by now, in the closing years of the century, many musical styles grow in the same garden, a situation which has given rise to the use of such terms as *fragmentation, multiplicity*, and *pluralism* by those attempting to describe the current musical scene. No wonder the listening public finds it a chaotic scene! Any orderly mind, no matter how willing, might well despair of finding a perspective on twentieth-century music.

Perspective in music is similar to perspective in the visual arts. For one thing, it is dependent on where one stands at any given time; for another, the object under discussion must be examined from various vantage points—close-up and in detail, and from a distance—until the work comes slowly into focus or, to borrow the title of the Baylor symposium, until the past meets the present. When we confront the picture of twentieth-century music from close up, it is to deal with practical matters—performances, performers, programming, and finances. It is when we attempt to gain a broader perspective that we must step back into the past to consider the basic concepts and problems that are endemic to American music.

America's Cultural Inferiority Complex

Knowledge of early American music history is essential toward gaining an understanding of the contemporary scene, for there is little doubt that some of our current problems began in colonial times when American responses to the arts were conditioned for a long time to come. If one

comprehends the nature of the Puritan ethic and can imagine the place of music in eighteenth-century America, then the startling contrast between the highly developed musical culture of Europe and the crude beginnings of colonial America reveals itself. We can see the start of a line that runs across the entire musical map of America—a line labeled "American Inferiority Complex," with signposts along the way reading, "Go to Europe." The line gains strength as it travels through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. It only begins to fade after World War II, when so many European artists were forced to flee to America, drastically changing the balance of world culture.

Pioneering America, struggling for survival, viewed the arts as functional, as George Washington and Benjamin Franklin, himself a musician, observed. Francis Hopkinson, Thomas Jefferson, and other composers and artists all made their living at something other than music. The sense of inferiority that pervaded the arts early in American history engendered deep conservatism. The founding fathers could not afford to take chances on anything experimental or innovative or on the few original creative talents that appeared on the scene; William Billings, for example, that amazing eighteenth-century composer who was a sort of early-day Charles Ives and who tried to make it on his own as a composer, nearly starved his family in the process. This attitude of functionalism has stayed with American music throughout its history. Almost never has there been the kind of subsidy for the artist that would give him freedom to pursue only his art. Even today, few composers can make a living without taking a teaching position.

When Americans finally were able to pick up their heads to look around, they found that there was an enormous amount of catching up to be done. America, liberal in principle, was traditional in reality. And, although progress was a national ideal, and we always liked the idea of being musically progressive, we did not have the confidence to put our ideals into practice. Americans were told so often that they were not capable of being artistic that they believed it for a very long time. Politically we were revolutionaries, but culturally we were Anglicized and Anglo-centered, with ties to England that remained very strong.

Other present-day situations can be understood better from an examination of the past: We are reminded of how recent our beginnings were, how short our musical history, and how slim our book of musical memories. Americans have no heritage of an art music from which to draw. Our New England forebears barely knew how to read music and could sing only a handful of simple tunes. With few exceptions, early American music was imported or highly derivative—first dominated by the English and later by the Germans.

The division between the popular and classical or vernacular and cultivated genres that began in colonial times created a serious schism in American music that still exists today. From very early on, Americans adopted missionary attitudes toward indigenous music (both Indian and

black, or slave, music). No black music was even written until the 1860s, when some plantation songs were notated. Our view of the Indians has been, at best, one of the noble savage. We have showed an almost total disregard of the earliest Spanish settlers and their influence on us and on our musical development. Folk music was ignored as being lowbrow, particularly as the middle class grew.

For a long time, Americans were in a kind of middle-class bind— not able to look up or down—not ready for a highbrow cultivated and polished music, or able to accept the lowbrow jazz and folk that flourished without attention (probably to its ultimate advantage) as a subculture. There was a cartoon in the newspapers for years, called "Maggie and Jiggs," that illustrates what I am talking about: As soon as they came into a little money, Maggie bought some fancy clothes and dragged Jiggs to the opera, the epitome of high culture. Jiggs in his undershirt with the boys at the corner pub wanted nothing to do with such sissy stuff. From very early on in our history, Americans yearned for European high culture on the one hand, and on the other, we wanted to be down- to-earth "real folks"—but not too real. Folk music was not considered as an art form until the Lomaxes and Seegers began to collect and perform traditional music earlier in this century. And jazz has always been problematic for Americans. While Europeans have welcomed American jazz performers and composers respectfully, Americans themselves, caught in that old middle-class bind seem not to know what to do about composers with names like Duke, Fatha, Cootie, and Bird.

As we move toward the picture of the twentieth century with the aim of gaining perspective, the nineteenth century comes into focus as a time when American musical establishments were founded, based on European models—orchestras, opera houses, choral societies, conservatories. Composers were expected to study in Europe, and every American town had its German music teacher. Early in the century, when a truly original American composer appeared on the scene Anthony Philip Heinrich was called "Papa Heinrich, The Beethoven of Kentucky," to show his advanced status. Another American original, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, preferred to speak only in French and to live abroad. And he was encouraged to do so. On the other hand, each wave of immigration made its impact on American culture. Given the extent and diversity of immigration to this country in the nineteenth century, the eclecticism of twentieth-century music seems a natural result.

Today we are still impressed by what is foreign. We use foreign models in music education: the Kodaly system, the Orf system, and the Suzuki method. We haven't taken ourselves seriously. It was not Americans who first paid attention to American music; black music was used by Debussy in "Golliwog's Cake Walk," and Stravinsky and Darius Milhaud both used jazz rhythms and ragtime. Panassié, a Frenchman, was the first to write about jazz; books on Duke Ellington were by Englishmen; and Wilfrid Mellers, also English, was one of the first historians to deal seriously with American musical history. More recently, it was the

Germans who idolized the American avant-garde, well before we ourselves expressed interest in such composers as John Cage and Earle Brown.

By the end of the nineteenth century, it was not an American but a European composer, Dvorak, who was invited here to set up a national conservatory. By then, American composers held positions of importance in New England—John Paine, Henry Chadwick, and Horatio Parker. Talented composers who were the result of America's Europeanization, they did their best to write good German or French music. At the turn of the century, while Edward MacDowell composed music derived from European models, and Arthur Farwell and George Cadman wrote pseudo- ethnic compositions, Charles Ives, in complete isolation, composed innovative, experimental works without European or any other models. Gaining perspective, we can now see Ives clearly; he is in the very center of the picture of American music, looking back and looking forward, incorporating the psalms, rags, gospels, parlor songs, and folk tunes of the country's past into a music that incorporated and foreshadowed the multiplicity of styles to follow.

Since lves, changes have come rapidly, calling forth valid questions about twentieth-century music: How does it compare with music of the past? Is modern music becoming more accessible? Has technology affected contemporary music? What differences exist between European and American composers—and from one region in this country to another? These questions and others are asked frequently and debated often by composers and before the public. But if one were to choose the topic most central to discussions on twentieth-century music, it would be the acceleration of change and the resulting multiplicity of compositional styles.

If familiarity with America's musical past is essential to gain perspective on the current musical scene, institutions of higher education must encourage and supply such knowledge. But a puzzling situation exists, inside and outside of academia, that prompts a fundamental question concerning the common level of interest in American music history: Why have music schools and departments of American studies not moved closer to the goal of including in their curricula courses dealing with American music? In conservatories, where the concentration is on performance, the repertory is overwhelmingly European. In schools where composers are in residence, both faculty and students must face performances of their new music by players who know little or nothing about American music, past and present. In departments that specialize in American studies (and I must include here such prestigious places as Yale and Harvard), it is amazing to consider that both undergraduate and graduate degrees are often conferred without the most basic knowledge of historical facts or even an awareness of the names of America's leading musical figures. The Bay Psalm Book is studied as literature, religion, and artifact—not as a book used for singing; attitudes toward recreation among the Puritans are examined thoroughly as a sociological topic without any attempt to understand the Singing School

movement as the sole recreation for both young and old in colonial towns; the Civil War is a favorite subject in literature and history courses, but rarely are those ubiquitous, nineteenth-century parlor songs studied, and they reflect, as nothing else can, the melancholy and nostalgia of pre-Civil War America. Popular culture courses search for symbols of national identity such as the Brooklyn Bridge and Mickey Mouse; and, of course, Whitman and Emerson are thoroughly examined in every detail. But there is hardly a mention of Charles Ives and Aaron Copland. The revered Emerson of "The American Scholar" would not be pleased.

The situation is paradoxical, considering the fact that, to college students, music is not a luxury but a necessity. The college population manages to buy more high-fidelity materials than any other consumer group, and, together with the precollege buyers, more recordings. It is not uncommon to find sparsely furnished dormitory rooms and modest apartments with expensive, sophisticated playback equipment, perhaps installed in orange crates. These items are given the care and attention normally reserved for precious antiques and valuable artifacts. Take a stroll on any college campus on a day when the windows are open, and you will hear a rich and diverse mix of sounds—from Bach to Springsteen and everything in between. On such an excursion, I heard "Fanfare for the Common Man" blaring from an open window. I called out, "Bravo, Copland!" And a voice answered back, "No, ma'am, that's Emerson, Lake, and Palmer." What it was, of course, was a rare mix of popular with classical—an example that typifies the puzzling dichotomy in American music on college campuses: on one hand, a real need and use of music; on the other, a lack of interest and curiosity in its history and derivation. The other arts—-literature, art, drama, and film——play lesser roles than music in the daily lives of students, but music is the most neglected where academic study is concerned.

Lack of student demand may account for the barren condition of most colleges' course curricula in American music, but it does not fully explain or absolve those responsible. Aware of the situation, a few years ago I decided to gather some statistics; a questionnaire was devised to send to American studies programs throughout the country. The questions asked for specific information about the nature of what was being taught in American music and by whom. In the summer of 1981 the questionnaire was sent by my office, Oral History, American Music, to 292 institutions listed in *American Quarterly* that offered American studies programs. The results were overwhelmingly negative. Almost all of those who offered American music listed only a single course, and almost all American music courses stemmed from music schools or departments. Only nine of the respondents offered courses sponsored directly by American studies programs, and only two listed American music as a degree requirement. Without going into further detail (results can be had on request), the point is clear and was emphasized by a search through 120 past issues of *American Quarterly*: Only 19 articles dealt with topics in American music.

I presented the results of this survey to a joint meeting of the Sonneck Society, the American Musicological Society, and the American Studies Association in 1983. Since then, there have been hopeful, albeit slow- moving signs toward change---at least in the musicological society which, until recently, had maintained a highly European attitude. One could count the number of scholars in American music on one hand; now it takes two. The Sonneck Society, with its journal, *American Music*, has celebrated its first decade. The society gives Americanists a forum for their ideas and writings. Moreover, the Bicentennial was an incentive to looking at ourselves. Scott Joplin came into our consciousness at about that time along with a ragtime revival. In a nation of ins and outs and ups and downs, Joplin came to be in because of "Maple Leaf Rag." To our surprise, we realized that Joplin had composed a full- length opera and other works that should be taken seriously.

Music and the Sense of National Identity

With all of its problems and complexes, American music has come a long way in a relatively short time. We are an export nation in music, no longer sending musicians and composers abroad to study, but supplying the world with its foremost artists. (In Rome recently, looking for something to see or hear one evening, I was faced with a choice between Marilyn Home, Peter Serkin, or the Paul Taylor dancers.) Music has become a leading export industry of this county, but we are still uncertain and insecure as to what part American composition itself should play on the world scene. Attitudes are formed very early in life. Little classical music is taught to the very young—virtually no modern music- and less and less of it is heard as a child grows older. Without knowing our own music, how can we determine how to consider it on an international basis?

Music today does seem to be in an accessible phase. The public relations people who wrote about the 1983 and '84 HORIZONS festivals at Lincoln Center featuring the new romanticism new! It's new!"- so with little historical perspective. As I described earlier, a similar pattern took place in the 1930s, and if one looks closer, clearly there are those composers who have been writing tonal music all along. Ned Rorem is one of them, and he has said wryly, "It's like praising reformed smokers without recognizing those of us who never smoked at all!" Is there some danger in music's becoming more accessible? The same question was asked with deep concern when Copland went to Hollywood in the forties to compose film music; his colleagues thought he was lost to movieland forever. It is a legitimate concern, after all, to wonder if what is best for the most people curries mediocrity. Perhaps the greatest music must be misunderstood by the general public or not understood at all for a period of time except by the few minds that can absorb it and understand its techniques. But how can composers adjust to this idea when the

prevailing aesthetic is an existential one? We live for today, not for what may be in an extremely uncertain future.

The Role of Oral History

The study of history is one means of gaining perspective on contemporary music. Another kind of history is the collecting and preserving of recent and current musical activities directly from major creative figures. It is toward this end that oral and video history archives have come into being, and, of course, it is modern technology that has made Oral History, American Music, possible. The project which I direct at the Yale School of Music is now in its fifteenth year; it is the only archive of this kind in music and has become a sizable repository of source materials in American music. Interviews conducted for Oral History, American Music, primarily with composers, mirror in microcosm the look back into history essential for perspective, interviewer and interviewee together search the subject's early years, tracing the family influences, background, and education, following those lines as the interview moves from the childhood through early and then mature years. Collectively, the archive projects a picture of time and place in the history of American music. Partly through our efforts, we hope that this century may be more thoroughly documented than in earlier times, although an irony exists here: Technology has made such advances possible, but technology, in the form of the telephone, has done severe damage to written documentation, thus making oral archives even more valuable as we move into the future. Already, many major figures represented in Oral History, American Music, have died. The collecting of information as well as the preservation of the personalities of our composers—in sound and more recently sight—add greatly to written documentation for scholars and biographers and contribute to the public's understanding of the music of twentieth-century American composers. Oral history is a unique means of gaining perspective on the richness, confusion, and diversity of the times in which they-—and we—live. Many of the questions posed earlier remain unanswered and cannot be forthcoming, because we still do not hear or know very much contemporary music. Just as the diagnosis of an illness without the existence of the patient is academic, so is the question of how to achieve perspective on twentieth-century music without the experience of the music itself. The final, and perhaps most important, word on perspective is that it depends on what the viewer or listener brings to it. Charles Ives wrote ". . . beauty in music is too often confused with something that lets the ears lie back in an easy chair."[2] We need ears that are open to new sounds and minds that are adventurous; we need to embrace our own music, not just as art to be enjoyed but also as a source or a sense of identity to be studied and assimilated into our national consciousness. If we can accomplish these tasks, twentieth-century music will come more clearly into focus.

As a result, our perspective and our pleasure in it and in our culture as a whole will mature and deepen.

Notes

[1] Milton Babbitt, "Who Cares if you Listen?" *High Fidelity Magazine* 8 (February 1958):38-40, 126-27.

[2] Charlse Ives, "Essays Before a Sonata," in *Essays Before a Sonata, The Majority, and Other Writings*, ed. Howard Boatwright (New York, Norton, 1961), p. 97.

IV. THE PROSPECTS OF ORAL HISTORY

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INTRODUCTION

William W. Moss returns to point toward the end of the symposium and the future of oral history. He is joined in the closing panel by keynote speaker Cullom Davis, to give the two of them a chance to compare observations on oral histories done poorly and well, and by the other speakers. Under the leadership of Ronald E. Marcello, the panel summarizes a variety of concerns, from practical and methodological to the more speculative. The ideas in this concluding section of the proceedings express the view that, for all its problems and pitfalls, the prospects for oral history are bright and that our culture is better off because of its existence.

ORAL HISTORY: WHERE IS IT GOING?

William W. Moss

It is extremely difficult to muster up a clear vision of the future of oral history. One of the reasons is that oral history is a technique in the service of many disciplines, and it is each discipline that imparts a sense of theoretical vision rather than the technique employed. Some years ago, when oral history was new and enticing, fanciful speculation came easier, it's worth examining some of those speculations to see what has become of them.

One of the common notions floating around oral history circles when the Oral History Association was first organized was something that people were calling, paradoxically, "the oral book." No one was able to define this mythic beast very precisely, but it seemed to be composed entirely of voice recordings, perhaps aided by still and moving pictures, with a thesis and a logic of progression—a beginning, middle, and end— from inquiry to conclusion through a body of evidence, all organized and lucidly presented. Well, we haven't really seen that, and we may never see it. What has happened, on the other hand, is that the more traditional film and television and radio documentaries have been enriched by more and deeper, more searching personal interviews, not just for window dressing but for more profound understanding of the issues and events involved. It may very well be that the future of the "oral book" is in the field of journalism, or at least in television, where the professionals rely on and live in the medium of verbal and visual images rather than in the academic world of linear sequential written compositions.

At the Oral History Association meeting of 1974, three emerging trends were noted. One was the Studs Terkel phenomenon of profitable publication of selected excerpts from oral interviews, organized around a central theme. This has continued. It has certainly been food for Studs Terkel, and a number of others have managed to publish in his train successfully but with less popularity or profit. Another trend noted in 1974 was the likelihood that oral history in local towns and counties and in institutions was likely to grow rapidly. Without a great deal of hard evidence, this seems to be true. Since many people "doing oral history" do not belong to the Oral History Association, it is hard to survey and assess the depth and breadth of oral history practice. But it appears repeatedly in many different sorts of places, so we may presume that it has reached epidemic proportions. This is also likely to continue. A third trend was the increased incorporation of oral history research as part of the equipment of the graduate student. At the time it appeared to many in universities to be little more than a gimmick——window dressing for illustrative purposes rather than an integral part of research and exposition. It has now become so commonplace as to be unremarkable.

Some other possibilities were noted in 1974. The device of magnetic

tagging of tapes as an indexing tool was foreseen, but this has not developed as a main feature of oral history finding aids. Rather, we have seen the development of the simultaneous time index on two-track tape in which a time signal parallels the spoken narrative and is keyed to a sort of table of contents to accompany the interview, which can be itself indexed and used as a cross reference among interviews throughout a collection and even among collections.[1] In 1974, the drama of the Watergate hearings and the Nixon tapes dominated the news and made us think of applications of electronic analysis to oral history tapes to measure stress levels of voices, but nobody has seemed to do much with that device to enrich understanding of history.

On the other hand, oral history as a pedagogical device in the classroom, viewed as somewhat of a gimmick in 1974, has demonstrated its value in countless situations and is likely to grow still further. Oral history in other countries has also grown substantially. There is an aperiodic meeting of an International Conference on Oral History, an *International Journal of Oral History*, and a UNESCO Records and Archives Management Program study on oral history, oral tradition, and archives.[2] It may be noted with interest that a recent export publication from the People's Republic of China is an "as-told-to" autobiography by one of the last of the Confucian direct descendants to live in the Mansion of Qufu, and it is subtitled "An Oral History."[3]

Developments and Trends

There are some encouraging trends today. In 1980 there was a call for greater dialogue between oral historians and folklorists, seeking ways to complement and supplement each other's work rather than criticizing each other from parochial perspectives. Some of what has happened here at this symposium, in the remarks of Barbara Allen, particularly, show the way to a modus vivendi between the two groups of professionals. The future in that direction looks bright. A very encouraging development is the forthcoming edition of the *Oral History Review*, a special supplementary issue, that will deal with the topic of field work methodology of the different disciplines using the recording of human voices. Such a work, based on standard methods of interdisciplinary comparisons, may be a very useful contribution in establishing a better understanding of the role of oral history within and among parent disciplines. It is one of the classic academic developments. It will be good for oral history and for the disciplines involved. Paradoxically, it may not help oral history retain its separate and distinct identity. It may not help people retain their identity as oral historians. It may not prolong the life of the Oral History Association. It may, indeed, do more to plow oral history back into the disciplines from which it came, but that might be a very good thing for both oral history and the parent disciplines.

There are two areas that we might look at for further discussion and

work, however, before oral history "withers away" by being absorbed back into the disciplines. One is an interdisciplinary study of oral evidence and its uses as an end product, after the model of the upcoming study of field work methodology mentioned above. In the previous talk on the origins and nature of oral history, both oral history and oral traditions were described as different sorts of phenomena, different sorts of evidence. Barbara Allen's discussion of folklore suggests that while it is often thought of interchangeably with oral tradition, we may mean rather different things when we talk about the two of them. But we should also consider two other classes of oral evidence and oral documentation, and include these in such a study. One is the simultaneous recording of a spontaneous event. Our most notorious example, of course, has been the presidential Oval Office recordings of presidents from Roosevelt to Nixon. However much they were deplored as sneaky things for great and noble presidents to do, historians have welcomed them as unique primary evidence. And historians have long been accustomed to using, or at least to listening to, audio recordings of speeches, debates, proceedings of conventions, and so on, to improve their own sense of understanding of the past events if not actually to quote them in their written works.

The fourth class of oral evidence may be called oral testimony. And this itself may be seen as having three subclasses. One is the testimony of journalism. Its objective is to acquire a sound and/or video recording of someone who is significant and pertinent to an issue or event saying something significant and pertinent about the event, testifying (in effect) to the importance of the event and thereby justifying the coverage being given the event. The speaker being recorded may be and often is also testifying in his own behalf or on behalf of an issue or cause he espouses. The second subclass of oral testimony is that collected by legal investigations as oral depositions, or recordings of oral interrogations and cross-examinations of witnesses. The character of this product is almost invariably driven by the purpose of the investigation, making the testimony immediate, highly specific, and directed, and to the point of the investigation under way. It is reliable evidence of the topic at hand, but at the same time highly biased by the limited perspective of the purpose at hand. The third subclass is an assertive kind of testimony similar to the religious notion of bearing witness, but it is not limited to religion. Professors use it when propounding a thesis. Advertisers do it repeatedly and often tiresomely. But it is a sort of oral evidence, and historians may employ it on occasion. The point here is that this is an area that needs further exploration and analysis, and there is a thesis for someone out there to help further understand the varied sources and uses of oral evidence beyond what we commonly know as oral history, but relating them to oral history so that their employment as evidence in historical research and writing may be improved.

Another area that needs further exploration and experimentation is the use of the visual dimension in the recording of oral evidence. Visual

recording can be used to complement and enhance the audio recording of any of the forms of evidence noted above. But video recording for the narrower purposes of oral history can itself be seen as having three parts. One is the use of visual imagery as a complement and supplement to the spoken narration, in which the scenes described or the events remembered are shown in photographic or videographic sequences as the narrator speaks of his memory of them. This is the very familiar "flashback" technique. Much less effective, and yet not without use, is the second visual mode, the dreaded "talking head" form of video recording. lt is not very exciting to sit and watch the same face or the same two faces during an hour-long question-and-answer interview session. If the topic is one where understanding it is very critical to a thesis, if the subject is visually interesting, or if the facial features must be studied for a full interpretation of the meaning and significance of the evidence, then a dedicated student might be able to sit through hours of talking heads. There is another and very specialized use of this form of audio-video recording, and that is for deaf researchers who need to lip-read the evidence rather than hear it. We think of oral history as a boon to the blind, but we forget that video history is an equal boon to the deaf. The third form of visual adaptation adds another dimension to the customary practice of oral history. Anyone who has tried to transcribe a group meeting knows the extreme difficulty of sorting out the voices and being quite certain who is speaking at any given moment. But in "video history" (if we may use that word) it is relatively easy to focus on the primary speaker visually. More importantly, in a group discussion among participants who have shared the same historical phenomena, there can be a sense of collegial excitement to the inquiry, probing areas of exploration and perspective that might well be missed in a one-on-one interview, and imparting a deeper and richer understanding to the viewer/listener. It is also true that sometimes such a group discussion among old acquaintances may omit areas that are sensitive or too commonplace for them to share with others, understood and accounted for tacitly among themselves but never made explicit in the recording session. There may have to be supplementary individual interviews to make up for the loss of such areas in group recordings. Again, this little analysis suggests rather than prescribes an area of profitable research and cross-disciplinary study for some enterprising graduate student or future editor of the *Oral History Review.*

In last night's talk by Cullom Davis, we heard a good deal of the pitfalls and dangers of what might be called the commercialization of oral history. We can all see readily what he was talking about, but this needs to be taken a step further, One of the reasons that commercialized oral history seems to dominate the field is that oral historians have been primarily collectors rather than producers of history. Until and unless oral historians themselves do more producing of synthesized history from their varied and disparate collectings, they have no one but them selves to blame for dominance in the field by the commercial and

journalistic interests. If there is one injunction we can urge on everyone, it is: Get out there and do your own writing and video productions. But be sure to do them the way Vivian Perlis has done with the Aaron Copland work or that the Rabun Gap folks have done with the Foxfire material: Keep intellectual and artistic control in your own hands. Never, never, never give it over to the television or magazine designers and editors. Otherwise you have no future but are merely contributing to theirs.

To Cullom Davis's worries about "vanity oral history" expressed to us last night. let me share with you a nightmare of my own. Some weeks ago, an earnest professional man came to me at the Smithsonian Institution Archives with an idea. He had been working with older people in the collecting of "life reviews," a psychological device for improving the mental attitude of people in their waning years. Eliot Wigginton yesterday spoke of this with a profound, intimate, and honest understanding and great integrity. But in the ideas of this fellow, the concept took on a frightening and perverted character that turned it, for me, into a nightmarish vision of a brave new world of which I want no part. He wanted the Smithsonian to establish and maintain a national repository of life reviews, a sort of mausoleum of taped reflections and recollections deposited by the heirs of dead citizens, whereby the dead could be assured of continuing in the national memory and whereby the about-to-be dead could have some hope for the same. This would be a sort of mummification of life histories that could be consulted by future generations. My own overactive imagination suddenly beheld a great and awful vision. There on the hill above Arlington Cemetery, where the Lee Mansion now stands, would be a great pyramid—The Life Histories Perpetual Repository— an eternal flame flickering from its peak and the words *Novus Ordo Seclorum* emblazoned on its eastern face in flashing neon lights. Every Secular Day, priestly processions of archivists and oral historians with electric guitars and strobe lights march across Memorial Bridge with the latest accumulation of lives to be deposited, singing in one great chorus, "We are the world!"

That, or something very like it, might happen if the historians do not maintain the integrity of the oral history product, if they refuse to get into the work of producing and packaging the work as well as writing it. The number of historians who have been seduced by publishers into perverting their research for maximum dramatic impact and sales grows annually, and the same may be true for oral historians unless they seize control and keep it.

An Affirmation of Faith

Nevertheless, despite this gloomy prognostication, I think there is hope. I will not be railroaded by last night's eloquent, articulate, and lucid jeremiad, and there are several reasons for this.

In the first place, I do not subscribe to the notion that oral history

is a discipline, a profession, or even a movement. Despite a methodology, despite a professional organization for its propagation, and despite the fact that a lot of us, including myself, have been and continue to earn money through its practice, it remains a technique in the service of many disciplines. Bereft of a parent discipline, whether history or anthropology, political science or pedagogy or whatever, it is nothing but undisciplined, random, aimless recording. Even the so-called archival collections require a thematic focus or a series of foci that ultimately depend on a discipline, usually history. Therefore, what imperils oral history imperils history itself, and as history endures, thrives, wanes, or fails, so does its contributing technique. There are scholarly allies that can and do counterattack to heap scorn upon the vapid and flatulent effusions of mass media publications.

Secondly, I believe that there beats a strong and vibrant heart of honest integrity that will not now nor ever will be stilled, the kind of integrity represented by the kids of Georgia and Aunt Arie, and the sense of self-worth of the folk of southern Appalachia when they know they will be heard and understood. These are as different in quality and historical significance from the vanity, instant, and sensory babble as are day and night. They, not the cheap products of publishing pulp, are the stuff of resilience and endurance.

Finally, I remain unshaken in a firm faith in the common-sense capability of the common person, even when untutored by elite academics, to perceive and to understand the difference between what is true and what is phony. Despite horoscopes and punk rock and the *National Enquirer*; vanity history, sensory history, and instant history, and other similar foolishness simply will not long survive the critical scrutiny of the hard-eyed realists who have to live at basic levels from day to day. That they thrive among the lotus eaters is an indication of the latter's shallowness and insubstantiality.

So, with an abiding, if perhaps somewhat irrational faith, what do I see as a future for oral history? Within the context of history as a discipline, I see it as a vehicle for continued diversifying enrichment of the sources of history, bringing to historical understanding the texture of fabric of human lives, testaments to negotiated terms of existence with a complex and sometimes incomprehensible environment and society. I see oral history as part of and perhaps even a catalyst for a synthesizing process of reconciling the significance of the individual to that of the group, to that of the society, to that of the human race, so we can rebuild a new vision of balanced equity and justice among all people, a rock of generalizations and conclusions based on total human experience, on which great political institutions and educational institutions are founded.

Notes

[1] *The State Historical Society of Wisconsin TAPE SYSTEM: A Method for Processing Oral History Interviews & Other Sound Recordings* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, n.d.), sets forth the methodology for tape indexing through "Timed Access to Pertinent Excerpts."

[2] William W. Moss and P. C. Mazikana*, Archives, Oral History*, *and Oral Tradition: A RAMP Study* (Paris: General Information Programme and UNISIST, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 1985).

[3] Kong Demao and Ke Lan, *In the Mansion of Confucius' Descendants: An Oral History* (Beijing: New World Press, 1984).

PANEL DISCUSSION 2

Ronald E. Marcello, chair
Barbara Allen
Cullom Davis
William W. Moss
Vivian Perlis
Eliot Wigginton

RONALD E. MARCELLO: I must say that I kind of approach this panel with a certain amount of trepidation because we seem to be getting into the realm of long-range trends and goals and where oral history is going. And the last time I posed this question to our former president of the Oral History Association relative to where the association should be going, there were several other presidents in attendance. I asked about this, and his reply was, "Long-range goals? All I was trying to do while I was president was get through the year." But, anyhow, I'm going to give it one more try. What I would like to do, first of all, is give each of the people on the panel, if they wish, an opportunity to either add to or clarify or perhaps even retract some of the things they mentioned earlier. And I'll just throw it out to the panel now.

CULLOM DAVIS: I'll comment on Bill Moss's presentation since he directed some of his remarks to my jeremiad of last night. I think Bill and I like to kind of create some sparks on that, but the fact is we're very much in agreement. I couldn't be happier if the Foxfires proliferated and if local history and local oral history proliferated as we practice it. What I was concerned about, and I think he shows that concern, is what's happening in American popular culture. And we can't change that, and I'm the last one to defend my profession as an historian for its dereliction of duty, which I think is severe. Bill is quite right in saying that the historians have basically deserted their social responsibility in serving American popular culture with good written history. But by the same token, I think I would be derelict as an historian not to point to those aspects of American popular culture that pass as history and that in my opinion demean oral history and endanger the good work that all of us are trying to do. We're very much in agreement, I think, and I think there is a part there that may be more hopeful than I portrayed last night, though I did point to some success. But I am concerned, and that concern is every bit as strong right now as it was at nine o'clock last night.

WILLIAM W. MOSS: I think I certainly agree with you, Cullom. I think that the difficulty sometimes comes because one looks so much like the other at least in superficial appearance. And it is sometimes that you only recognize the integrity of the core when you have experienced the real thing. If you have never experienced the real thing, you don't recognize the phoniness of the phony. And I think that is a difficulty. And I think it goes right back to education; I think it goes right back to the practice of the major disciplines, and I think that unless they are endowed with that kind of integrity, then we have fled the field and left it to the journalists.

BARBARA ALLEN: If I might respond to that as well, it seems to mc that there is a confusion here, at least in American popular culture, as Cullom says, between the use of oral history, or I should say the practice of oral history, of collecting the information, and the value of oral history, which is the use to which the material can be put.
MOSS: I think that's right. I think we've got to stress the use a great deal more than the collecting. I think that among oral historians— somebody today was saying, What do we do with all the tapes that are sort of building up in the closet? Well, it's not going to do anybody a bit of good if all you do is go out and do a lot of interviewing and hide the tapes in a closet. When I said we've got to write more, Saul Benison used to tell us that if you don't write that book out of the oral history research you do, nobody is going to pay any attention to you. And I think that's right. Vivian, you were saying yesterday that it was probably better if you did not have a vested interest in terms of a specific product. I think that is correct when you are under the gun of a publisher or under the gun of a tenure committee or something of that sort. On the other hand, I think that it is incumbent upon the people who are doing the collecting of oral history f research purposes to use it, to use it responsibly, and to show how it can be used responsibly; and if they don't, then they have let other people do it for them. And that's just too bad.
VIVIAN PERLIS: It's asking an awful lot, though. Sometimes you wonder whether you can do the high-quality interviewing and collecting and preserving of the material and also take the kind of time that it takes to do the book-publication kind of high-quality production you want from the material. I agree with you; it's important to get the material out there, but I find it often torn. I think I had mentioned our project on the history of Steinway and Sons Piano Company. And I know that when I did this project I said to all 140-something people that we interviewed, "This is a research project." And they'd say, Well, when is the book coming out? And I'd say, Well, no, we're collecting this material to use an oral history technique, towards, instead of a biographical approach---although each individual interview was biographical—to collect a history of an institution that had an impact on music culture and feed all of these interviews into that major picture. And I still can see that it would be, could be, and should be a wonderful book. And people still come to me—people we interviewed in this really were not listening when I said, "No, it isn't planned for a book, It's an archival project; these are going to be available for anybody, people who want the material." And the material has been used. We've gotten out the information that it's there. People in American studies use the material; for example, somebody who was wanting to do a history of Queens, the area where Steinway set up not only the factory, but they set up nursery schools and hospitals and so forth, when they first settled there. People who are studying immigration patterns have used some of the material, and people who want to know what Arthur Rubinstein

and Serkin felt about the kind of piano they were using. So it has been used by a great variety of people. Still, it would make a wonderful book, like the Ives and the Copland, taking the entire project. And I feel almost delinquent in not doing that book, based on that oral history project, especially when every time I see one of these 145 people, they say, When's the book coming out? I really agree with you, and 1 find that it's difficult, though, because you feel, well, I've got to get more of that material in there. I've so much to preserve, so much to do to keep the project alive. How much time can you take out for production?

MOSS: But there are two things in that. One, I think there will always be more collecting than writing. That's just inevitable. You're going to do that. And, yes, you have to pour in a lot of quality into the collecting in order to produce a base on which the writing can be done. But Just as Eliot was saying earlier, that the teacher cannot afford to neglect the basic housekeeping and the building up of testing of the students and so on, so that when the inspector comes around he can snow him with the data and so on; so the oral historian has to practice the crafting of history as well as the collecting of oral testimony in order to be able to produce the kind of history that is going to be beneficial generally. You've just got to get in there and engage. Even if it's hard, even if it takes extra time, even if you don't see how you can possibly do it, it's got to be done.

ALLEN: It seems to me that this is how oral history can work on a community level, because ordinarily it is not just one person in the local historical society who is going out and doing oral history collecting, but a bunch of people who are doing it. And when you have the kind of group effort, it seems to me that it might become easier then. Not one individual is burdened with not just collecting but also using the material to produce the kind of quality work that Bill is talking about. but a group might engage in that kind of endeavor as Eliot's students do.

DAVIS: It occurred to me there was some good advice in the point Vivian just made about her Steinway Company project. A lot of historians, oral historians, new and veteran, approach a particular assignment of seeking to get information on a particular subject from that. And what that can unfortunately overlook is the many unanticipated uses that can be made of oral history material in general. Here was a project that began as a corporate oral history and yet had all kinds of other serendipitous value for immigrant history, urban history, whatever. And it seems to me that the advice that one could extract from that experience for beginning oral historians is the general virtue of approaching the task in terms of life histories, really trying, if you can, if you can afford the time, no matter how focused and narrow your interests or project is, to interview people in terms of their full life experiences. The product, I think, by and large will tend to be better anyway. And, furthermore, there will be then a rich body of material that can have all kinds of possible applications and uses beyond what

you might have ever anticipated in approaching it in the first place. So there's a bit of advice, I think, that comes from the experience of a lot of us.

ALLEN: Which underscores as well the point that was made last night, that material that is gathered in this way. these kinds of life histories you are talking about, have to be very carefully indexed so that people know exactly what it is that the tapes contain—--not just information on one particular project but also information that may be of interest to other researchers as well, and then, of course, making known what your collection contains that people in other parts of the country or in other disciplines might be interested in. I think that's one of the key issues that oral historians also have to face. People are collecting information all over the country on a variety of subjects, and it's very difficult, as someone said this morning, to find out who's doing what where.

MARCELLO: How can people make known what they have? What are the best ways for them to do it?

MOSS: I hesitate to answer that because one of the principal ways of making it known is not working as well as we had hoped it would. The Library of Congress has something called the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections, known as NUCMC for short. It has a provision for the registration of, the listing of, the advertising of, if you will, oral history collections as well as manuscript collections. Everybody who is producing a substantial body of oral history material ought to have all those individual interviews, life histories, whatever, cataloged and sent in to NUCMC so that they can be listed in the National Union Catalog. That's the basic thing.

There are other ways of doing it. In terms of creating local area network information systems through public libraries, Nancy Whistler has created a Colorado area network through which cataloging information for oral history is distributed throughout Colorado, particularly through the state library and public library systems. Those kinds of mechanisms can be created and should be, and people from all different disciplines should have access to them and contribute to them, it's very hard to remember to do that when you're focused on your own immediate, local, or particular string of research. It's hard to remember that, yes, there is a place, there are mechanisms out there for you to make known what you have.

DAVIS: A couple of other suggestions—there are in most parts of the country regional oral history organizations such as the Texas Oral History Association here. People can get active in these and talk a bit about the work they've done. If there's a newsletter, send in an item describing what you've been doing; if there's a meeting, get on the program and talk about it. or the state historical organization, get on a program there and talk about it, or if there's a regional oral history association in your area, do the same there. Use newsletters and meetings of these regional and local and state organizations to let people, at least in your part of the country, become familiar with what you're doing.

MARCELLO: You've been talking about oral history for a day and a half, and again as was pointed out before, we don't have to try to convert the converted. In trying to find a theme or something we can come to grips with, what do you think have been the contributions that oral history has made to historical understanding?
ALLEN: I'm sure other panel members will have something to say, hut I'd like to simply repeat something I said this morning and that is, my understanding of the value of oral history is that it gives us that experiential perspective that is very often lacking in documents. It's not lacking entirely; it's very exciting to read personal documents, diaries, and letters, and even very dry kinds of documents. The final proof applications for homestead entries that I read in the National Archives came through as very personal documents. Nevertheless, oral history gives us a sense of what it felt tike—sensory history, if you don't mind my saying so, in a way—recalled sensory history. To me that's a contribution that oral history makes that cannot always be gotten at through other forms of historical research or from other historical materials.
MOSS: I would certainly agree with that, and one of the things when oral history first burst on the scene was that there was an assumption that it was the way of providing facts that might have been lost otherwise, things that people said to each other over the telephone or things that people said to each other in meetings that they never wrote down. That is true to a certain extent; you can recapture some of that, if imperfect. But what Barbara was talking about is the real contribution that it makes: the personal dimension, the experiential dimension, what I have called the process of negotiating terms of existence with reality. Everybody does it. Whether it's a head of a corporation or a farmer, everybody does that to a certain extent. And understanding how that happens on an individual basis, on a group basis, on a community basis, is one of the main contributions that oral history can make.
DAVIS: There's probably another singular contribution it's made in the last twenty or thirty years, as the handmaiden in the shift of historical attention to long-neglected subjects and groups. Much of the progress and achievement and the quality of work in recent years in recounting the lives of minority groups, of labor groups, of women, American Indians. and others, the previously unrecognized and inarticulate in historical experience, has been made possible as a result of oral history, which has created records where previously records either were nonexistent or at least scanty. So that it's been important in that way as well.
PERLIS: Along in the end of this long line here, I'd like to take up a little bit on what Barbara was saying this morning and what Cullom has said. Now, you just reminded me of the fact that composers, people I work mostly with, musicians and composers, consider themselves one of the most minor minority groups. They are. Barbara made me think about this morning, that sometimes when you're closely involved with

people and you get to know them well, it's like children of composers. The other kids will say, well, what does your daddy do? And when the say a composer, the other kids say, Yeah, right. Well, kids get used to that; that's what Daddy does. It's just as normal for them as somebody going off to wherever else they have to work. Whoever you work with, you get used to that being fairly common. But what you said about outsiders and insiders, composers are still a very mysterious kind of people. Somebody will meet them and say, What do you do? In the same way the kids would say to a composer's child, What do you *really* do for a living? They tend to kind of band together as a minority might and think nobody really can possibly understand what it means to take these millions of little black dots and put them on paper and make it into music.

So I was thinking this morning about what you said about oral history's being able to take people inside and get an inside look at something that previous to that has been very much removed and for all kinds of good reasons. And there are a lot of minority groups that we don't think of as minority groups; they feel that way in terms of other people understanding what they do. So I would like to emphasize: I think oral history can do this kind of thing. I don't know anything else that can function quite in the way of taking you inside and giving you the experience of being involved with something right from the inside of it the way oral history can.

ELIOT WIGGINTON: I'd like to add maybe two more. One of them I can't claim as my own, although I wish I could; it's a statement or a belief that Ralph Rinzler has at the Smithsonian. But when this kind of collecting is done within a group of people or a culture, it's still relatively intact, and when some attention and some respect is paid to that group, and that data is celebrated partly through the collection of oral history narratives and partly through festivals and that sort of thing. it suddenly has more implications than just simply a collection of history or an identity. Ralph says that it may also have in fact implications for mental health, because in places where groups and cultures and minority folks have lost that culture and sense of identity, such as on certain kinds of Indian reservations and that sort of thing, you find the highest incidence of alcoholism and suicide in the world. And so there are certain implications there that are important.

One other is that it can give the students involved in the collecting of this information, when they are a part of a cultural minority or subgroup, a real perspective on other cultures. Actually, they wouldn't even have to be part of another culture for this to happen, I guess, really. But one of the things that I do, for example, is take the rampant stereotype about the ignorant southern Appalachian hillbilly hick, you know, sitting on the front porch with the hogs running in and out underneath and toes sneaking out the front end of the boots and the old floppy big black hat and a liquor jug and an old hog rifle and three dogs sleeping on the porch and the whole thing. And then we

take those students through a whole process whereby they see where that stereotype came from in early popular novels of the l880s and 1890s, and how it was fostered and carried on into the twentieth century and how it's being perpetuated today through such things as the placemats you find in tourist restaurants that help you understand hillbilly talk and all of the little caricatures around the edges and all that.

And the students get involved in the process of doing oral histories and collecting information about that culture and finding out how ingenious people were and how strong they were and how resilient they were. They see for sure that something that they had suspected, i.e., that that stereotype was false, in fact is false. Then I can bring them back around and I can say, "Okay, now, let's talk about blacks for a while." And we'd list the stereotypes on the board. And we'd begin to get into conversations about, If just the stereotypes about you are inaccurate and wrong, so too may be most of the stereotypes and prejudices you carry about other minorities and subgroups. And we'd start talking about Mexicans and blacks and Southeast Asian folks and come to a little broader and more sensitive world view through the active collecting at home from a grandparent. And it can lead to some fascinating discussions and insights, I think, that can turn kids' attitudes completely around about those subgroups.

PERLIS: I would just like to say that I think we did lean very heavily on collecting of historical facts at the beginning. I don't think that we should let the pendulum swing too far away from the great value of that. I started to think about your question and realized that one of the main reasons that I like doing this kind of work is to keep the historical fact. We've all probably seen the movie *Amadeus* about Mozart; it's a wonderful film, but it's not really about Mozart. It seems to me if you see this documentary film that I have made from materials and videotape materials with Aaron Copland speaking his own piece, talking himself; if you have these artifacts and you have these people, OU have that kind of material and it exists, I think it's a lot more difficult for somebody years from now, many years from now, to take off on that and make some kind of fictionalized film about a major creative figure. So I do think that still one of the main things about oral history is the preservation of the factual material---not only the fact, that is, the fact of the person the way he is, the way he thinks, the way he feels, the way he talks; the fact of all that is so important, that preservation aspect of that, so that it deters some kind of use of material that none of us appreciates. Especially with our major creative figures it just seems like such a travesty of their great work that they've given us, riot to be able to deal honestly with their lives. And we come to do so.

MOSS: [In response to a question from the audience] In my own family I have tape recorded interviews. I don't think they are anybody else's business. I'm not going to put them in some public library, and I don't think it's necessary to do so. They are private; they are for my family, for me, for my kids, and that has a whole other purpose from the practice

of history as a discipline and in terms of broad-gauged understanding of the society. in family papers it may be the last surviving piece of something, of evidence of life in that locale, and it may become important, and that's something else. It is definitely therapeutic, very valuable for the individuals as private individuals to go through these things. That's not necessarily the same thing, and I certainly hope it is not the same thing as the kind of mummification as I was deploring in the talk I gave. I think there is a big difference, and I tried to stress that. I think family history is necessary I think it is essential to a family's health and their own self-esteem.

ALLEN: And I think it's true, Bill, because in that instance the recording and the preserving of the material is being done within a very special context. And what you are talking about, this wonderful image of the high priest carrying the life histories to some impersonal, dead repository, is a valid image. It's when the material is removed from its original context — if you're doing local history, you're doing it for the enrichment of the community whose history it is. As Eliot and his students are doing, as a family is doing, it may ultimately become, as Bill says, important for a historian to try to make a connection between the local and the national experience. But at whatever level oral history is conducted, with that, in the spirit of integrity that you spoke of, it's valid. I think that's why we could all be here in this room together, because we're all vitally involved in doing the same thing on different scales.

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