

**FALL MEETING AT GALLAUDET COLLEGE**

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 17

OHMAR's fall meeting will be held at the Learning Resources Center at Gallaudet College in Washington, D.C. on Saturday, November 17. Registration will begin at 9:30, the program at 10 a.m. The morning session will feature the presentation of the Forrest Pogue Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Oral History to Donald Ritchie, Associate Historian, United States Senate Historical Office. The afternoon session, "UNESCO: Oral History and Oral Reputation," will address the variety of issues confronting the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization in its work in oral history. Thomas Forstenzer of UNESCO will discuss "UNESCO's Oral History Program Around the World," and Joseph Mehan, also of UNESCO, will speak on "UNESCO: Journalistic Folklore and Operational Reality."

OHMAR's spring meeting for 1985 will be held in New Jersey on Saturday, March 30 at the Social Sciences Building at Rutgers University, Camden. It will seek to offer a self-critical perspective on oral history by displaying the efforts of a wide variety of community history projects.

For further details on either of these programs, please contact: in the Washington area, Mary Jo Deering (301) 654-8073; in the Baltimore area, Linda Shopes (301) 455-2319; and in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, Perry Blatz (609) 292-6062.

**New Officers for 1984/85**

Chairman Pete Daniel reports that the Nominating Committee will put forward the following slate of candidates for OHMAR officers at the fall meeting:

**President:** Linda Shopes is an instructor in American Studies at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, in Catonsville, Md. She has been involved in numerous community oral history projects, including the NEH-funded Baltimore Neighborhood Heritage Project. She is currently at work on a documentary on cannery workers in Baltimore.

**Vice President:** Fern Ingersoll is currently working on a book based on oral histories and ethnographic participant-observation in a Thai village. She has conducted interviews with government officials, congressmen, women suffragists, and managers of the national forests.

**Treasurer:** David Seaman is professor of foreign language at Davis and Elkins College, where he teaches a course on "Local and Oral History." His oral history projects include research on Italian immigrants in the coal fields and work with oral and visual (video) histories of artists.

**Secretary:** Marie Allen works at the National Archives where she is currently on detail with the Archives Technological Assessment Office, examining archival applications of new information technology. Between 1975 and 1984 she served as Director of the White House Liaison Office, for the Office of Presidential Libraries, and administered oral history programs with White House staff during the Carter and Reagan Administrations.

**At-Large Board Member:** Barry Lanman teaches at Millford Mill High School in Baltimore. He received his Ph.D. from Temple University in May 1984, with a dissertation on "An Analysis of Traditional and Oral History Teaching Methods in High School Immigration and Black History Curriculum." In April 1984 he was named educator/historian of the year by the U.S. Capitol Historical Society.



**INTERVIEW WITH DONALD A. RITCHIE**

At the fall meeting on November 17, OHMAR will present its 1984 Forrest Pogue Award for distinguished and significant service to oral history to Donald A. Ritchie, Associate Historian of the Senate Historical Office. In connection with that award, he was interviewed by Martha Ross on August 13, 1984. Portions of that interview follow:

**ROSS:** If we might I'd like to get into a bit of your personal background as we begin, to put your life as a historian into a personal context. Can you tell me a little bit about your family background and your early years?

**RITCHIE:** Well, I come from Geraldine Ferraro's Congressional District in Queens, New York, which I'm glad to see has finally gotten some recognition. My family has lived there for years and years...I went to the same high school that my parents went to, and that my grandfather went to, which is very unusual in New York. I left Newton High School in Queens and, while most of my friends were going to Queens College, I went to C.C.N.Y [City College of New York] in Manhattan. From my neighborhood you could...see the skyline of Manhattan, and it was always like Oz to me. That was where I wanted to go...

While I was at City College, I came to the conclusion that I liked history. I did well in it, and I had some very good professors. Probably the most influential professor I had as an undergraduate was Fred Israel, who was a very imaginative fellow...He conducted his upper level course as a seminar and sent us out doing projects...One of the things he had us do was go out and interview three people who lived through the Depression. In a sense, this was my first experience with oral history. Like most of the other people in the class, I interviewed my parents and grandmother. That was interesting because I found out that my parents had very different experiences...The whole class discovered that not everybody suffered during the Depression. We just had the image that everybody was in a bread line and everybody was selling apples, and suddenly you began to see the gradations in society.

The most imaginative person in the class...went out and interviewed a bookie and

a priest. He said that the bookie told him he never did better business than he had during the Depression, and the priest remembered that there were a lot more dinners in the church basement, so his social life was more active during the Thirties, so that also gave me an inkling that you had to be as varied as possible with the subjects of your interviews...

Eventually I was looking around for graduate school in 1967, partly to get a master's degree so I could teach in high school, and partly to stay in school so I wouldn't get drafted, because the war and the draft were all going on. Fred Israel strongly recommended the University of Maryland, for a number of reasons. One, he said it was near the Library of Congress...The second was that he knew some of the faculty members, including [Horace Samuel] Sam Merrill [who became my doctoral advisor ]...

I discovered, to my surprise, that while I thought a master's degree was about all I was every going to be able to attain that it didn't seem to be all that difficult. It was a strong department with at least 120 teaching assistants on the top floor of Francis Scott Key Hall. There were some really excellent people--people with whom I still associate and who are publishing books and doing interesting things in Washington and around the country. There was just a general fervor of being a graduate student at that time...So I really began to feel at home in that environment, and then began to think, "Well, maybe I should go on for a Ph.D."...I never did go back to New York to teach high school as I had thought...

After being drafted and serving in the Marines for two years, I returned to the University of Maryland. I finished my Ph.D. in April of 1975, and then I was a gypsy teacher for about two years in all the area schools: University of Maryland University College, Northern Virginia Community College, George Mason University--wherever, whenever. I worked also at the AHA [American Historical Association] with Walter Rundell on a bibliography study. And then the Senate in its wisdom decided to create a historical office, and lo and behold, they hired me. I've been there ever since.

**ROSS:** Well, back a little bit to the selection of your dissertation topic--how did that come about?



study...You have done both kinds of interviews, although not for the same individual. Do you have a sense of there being things that, if you were actually doing a biography of this individual...that perhaps you would ask different questions or would probe maybe more deeply?

RITCHIE: I think they're very different types of projects. When I did my bibliography for Landis, I listed "Oral Histories and Interviews," and I really saw them as different. I'm conscious when I'm doing my interviews of a future researcher coming to use them, and I think about my use of the Landis interview that Neil Gold did, and how useful that was to me, and also how frustrating it was. On one hand, Gold was a very good follow-up person. There were lots of unexpected things that popped up during the interview, and he would say, "Oh, I didn't know anything about that. Tell me about it." And Landis would tell him about it.

But then there were other points when I would be reading along saying, "Now ask him about this," or, "Ask him about that." And, of course, he didn't; he would go on to something else and I never got the answer to my question.

Every interviewer, every person writing a dissertation or a book, every biographer will have their own set of questions they'll want to ask, but they won't have the opportunity to ask those questions. Landis died ten years before I started working on him, and I was thankful for what I got. But I would like researchers in the future who use my interviews to be thankful for what they got from me and not to be pulling their hair out because I didn't ask the right questions.

The interviews that I conducted for the biography were narrow and directed. I had this person; he fit into Landis' life in this way; and that was all I was interested in asking about...Now I'm doing these large archival interviews, and I realize that I can't be as specific. I can't anticipate all the questions future researchers are going to want to ask. But I try to approach it as if I was the researcher: what would I like to know from this person?...

[Many questions and answers later]. ROSS: Well, that sort of discussion seems to bring us to a graceful closing. Is there anything in terms of a reflective nature that you'd

like to add?

RITCHIE: The only thing I guess we haven't talked about is that, in addition to the historical training that went into my interest in oral history, and the accidental approach to oral history, and the on-the-job use of oral history, I've also gotten a tremendous amount of reinforcement from OHMAR and the OHA. You are also responsible in part for that because I remember being invited to the luncheon that you and Mary Jo Deering had at George Washington University...I was there when the call went out for people to participate in setting up a regional organization, not anticipating getting very deeply involved...And then all of a sudden I found myself knee deep in OHMAR from the beginning, and enjoying the company of the people who are here. I pick up a lot from the meetings and gatherings and social events that OHMAR has.

At the same time, Dick Baker at the Senate Historical Office thought it would be a good idea for me to go to an Oral History Association meeting. That year [1976] they were meeting at the Chateau Montebello in Quebec, and so that was a wonderful trip for me. I thought, "These people know how to put on a conference!" I've been to every colloquium since then, and we have been getting just as much on a national level in terms of the good fellowship and constant exposure to new ideas, and of the excitement about what's happening in the field of oral history. It's all been professionally reinforcing as well as personally satisfying.

ROSS: Of course, you make a tremendous contribution to these organizations as well.

RITCHIE: Thank you. I won't comment on that.

ROSS: I'd like to thank you very much for a most enjoyable, stimulating, and rewarding evening.

RITCHIE: Well, it's certainly interesting to see what it looks like from the other side of the tracks.

The State of the Art column will resume with the next issue, featuring Linda Shopes' "Beyond Trivia and Nostalgia: Collaborating in the Construction of a Local History."



## REGIONAL REPORT

**Pennsylvania:** The Girl Scouts of Greater Philadelphia have published "Tell It Like It Was...a Guide to Carrying Out an Oral History Project in a Girl Scout Council." From 1981 to 1983 Senior Girl Scouts of Greater Philadelphia compiled an oral history of the council, in a project sponsored by the NEH. This Guide grew out of their experiences, and was published through a grant from the Barra Foundations. William W. Cutler, III and Julia Eriksen of Temple University served as consultants to the project. Copies of the Guide can be obtained from the Girl Scouts of Greater Philadelphia, 7 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

**New York:** In 1977, the New York State Nurses Association Council on Research began videotaping interviews with individuals directly involved in critical events leading to the evolution and professionalization of nursing through their activities in the New York State Nurses Association. The time frame selected for the project was 1920-1980. To date, four interviews have been completed featuring Marion Sheahan Bailey, Lucille Notter, Esther Thompson, and Veronica M. Driscoll.

Mrs. Bailey chaired the New York State Nurses Association Committee on the Nurse Practice Act from 1932-1938. This group spearheaded the passage of the Nurse Practice Act in New York State in 1938. Dr. Notter was President of the Association from 1959-1961, and is a noted pioneer in nursing education and research. Miss Thompson served as President of the Association from 1955-1959 and as Chairman of the Committee on Education from 1966-1969. From 1966-1967 this Committee developed and published the Blueprint for Nursing Education, a document whose main objective was to elevate the education of all nurses to institutions of higher education. Dr. Driscoll was Executive Director of the New York State Nurses Association from 1969-1979. During Dr. Driscoll's tenure as Executive Director, the current legal definition of nursing in New York State was enacted with the Nurse Practice Act of 1972. Also, during that period, the New York State Nurses Association became a nationally recognized leader in the area of collective bargaining for registered nurses.

The facilities required for the project

have been relatively modest. The Library and the Archives of the Association, which contain important papers pertaining to the history of the Association, as well as important historical documents on Nursing in New York State, served as a primary resource for background materials on the interviewees. The Association members who compiled the bulk of the background data and conducted the interviews voluntarily contributed time and travel expenses incurred by the project. The technical aspects of production and editing were handled by a variety of media professionals: the first and second videocassettes were independently produced; the third was produced at facilities at the University of Rochester; the fourth at the State University of New York at Stonybrook. The end product of each interview and the background research is an oral history module. Each module contains a 3/4 inch videocassette, a transcript of the videocassette, a monograph, a resume and other supportive/illustrative materials. For further information contact Warren G. Hawkes, New York State Nurses Association, 2113 Western Avenue, Guilderland, NY 12084, (518) 456-5371.

The New York Historical Resources Center has published History for the Public, which describes the Historian-in-Residence Program, showing how and why academic scholars and public historians should work together. Copies are \$10.95, and can be purchased from the NY Historical Resources Center, 506 Olin Library, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853 (make checks payable to Cornell University Libraries).

**Maryland:** The U.S. Naval Institute in Annapolis announces the release of four new volumes of oral history transcripts, including Admiral Kemp Tolley's colorful reminiscences of his unorthodox naval career. Paul Stillwell, director of the oral history program, explained that this brings the number of bound transcripts in the collection to over 140 volumes. In addition to the Tolley memoirs, the new transcripts include interviews with Admiral Philip A. Beshany, first deputy chief of naval operations for submarine warfare; Admiral John S. Coye, commanding officer of the submarine Silversides in World War II; and Admiral Draper L. Kauffman, Superintendent of the Naval Academy during the turbulent 1960s.

# OHMAR

gives clear information and advise on how to conceptualize and research a personal family history. Richard Cox's and Anne Turkos' "Local History Research and the Records of Baltimore's Housing and Community Development Agency," describes by example how the records of a specific municipal agency can be used to construct not only a local history of Baltimore but also a larger history of American city.

OHMAR member Robert Terry, a member of the faculty at York College of Pennsylvania in York, has recently published Light in the Valley: the McCurdy Mission School Story. The work documents the history of this United Methodist institution, located in northern New Mexico, since its origin in 1912; as part of his research for the book, Terry interviewed dozens of people associated with the school over its 72 year history. Terry and his wife Shirley first became associated with the McCurdy School when they visited it in 1980 as members of a church-sponsored work camp. This became, he said, "the beginning of a love affair with the school, its teachers, its students and its neighbors. As volunteers we shared in an experience that has changed our lives, rekindled our faith and gave us personally a new mission." Out of this came the motivation to write Light in the Valley. For information about obtaining the book, contact Professor Terry at York College.

The University Press of Kentucky this spring published Past Titan Rock: Journeys into an Appalachian Valley by Ellesa Clay High. Written in collaboration with Lily May Ledford, best known as the lead performer of the first all-girl string band on radio, and combining the forms of personal essay, oral history, and short fiction, the book attempts to recreate imaginatively the past ways of life of Red River Gorge in eastern Kentucky. As noted in the publisher's blurb, "Through its blend of testimony and imagination, the book suggests fresh ways of looking at the past--of how we interpret and create both history and literature."

"New Yorkers at Work: Oral Histories of Life, Labor and Industry," originally a radio series produced by New York University's Tamiment Institute documenting such topics as immigrants and work, the 30's and the CIO, public employees and the service crisis, and

contemporary clerical labor, is now available for classroom use. The series included eight one-half hour cassettes with accompanying study guides; for further information contact: Robert F. Wagner Labor Archives, Tamiment Institute Library, Elmer Holmes Bobst Library, New York University, 70 Washington Square South, New York, NY 10012.

And finally, an interesting collection that might stimulate the creative juices of oral history is contained in the Autumn, 1983 and Winter, 1984 issues of The Yale Review (Yale University Press, 92A Yale Station, New Haven, CT 06520). Collectively titled "The Telling of Lives," these issues are devoted to pieces which explore the ways in which writers tell the story of a life, their own or someone else's. Included are both literacy and analytic essays; among the authors are John Hershey, Jonathan Spense, Daniel Aaron, Robert Coles, R.W.B. Lewis, Alan Trachtenberg, and C. Vann Woodward.

Once again, please continue to send me suggestions for books to review as well as items to note in this column.



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Frank Smallwood, The Other Candidates: Third Parties in Presidential Elections (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1983). pp. xvi, 317.

Although its title suggests that this book discusses third party in presidential campaigns throughout American history, it in fact focuses on the eleven third-party candidates in the 1980 election. Frank Smallwood, a professor of public affairs at Dartmouth and a stand-in running mate of John B. Anderson in Vermont in the 1980 campaign, conducted interviews with each of the third-party candidates between June 1981 and January 1982. Following a brief review of previous third-party campaigns, the book largely consists of transcripts of those interviews. The author also analyzes the institutional and procedural obstacles that third parties confront in trying to gain attention and votes. He argues that such barriers should be removed, or at least lowered, because third parties contribute vitality, diversity, and stability to the



asking a great deal of a reader to wade through 140-odd pages of interviews to appreciate his concluding synthesis. And the thesis itself would have been a lot stronger had it been demonstrated through a sophisticated exploration of working class culture rather than in the form of an argument with other labor historians.

The editors/compiler of Brass Valley pursued a course quite different from Bodnar's. While Workers' World fits neatly into a traditional academic context, Brass Valley is a product of the community history movement that has grown during the past decade--a movement in which workers and other members of a community share with historians in the study, interpretation, and sometimes the presentation of their own histories. Brass Valley is, as the editors say, history "not as an academic exercise, but as a social act." This is an advocacy brand of a new social history in which the authors state their ideological sympathies right up front. The Brass Valley Project, of which this book is a product, was conducted in cooperation with local unions. The pro-union perspective gives the book much of its flavor and direction.

The book chronicles the lives and struggles of the people who lived in the Naugatuck Valley of Western Connecticut. This is a very ambitious undertaking, not only in its historical scope, but also in its attempt to address the challenge of producing a collaborative history, of giving historical voice to the industrial workers and union activists of Brass Valley. It is thought-provoking example of advocacy community history; but it is, for me at least, seriously flawed. The first problem is one of scope. The subject is just too broad to be sustained by the content of the interviews presented. Some of the questions are very strong, as informative and eloquent as could be desired. But there are excessive amounts to fill; weak excerpts that fatten and flatten the book. Perhaps one cause of this was the decision to present the story, as much as possible, through first-person accounts. If this were the case, then more powerful interviews were needed to do justice to the people of Brass Valley.

This leads to the second and more perplexing issue of authorship. The project directors undoubtedly struggled over the questions of authorship and interpretation. Of the options available to the community

historian, perhaps the most attractive strategy is to function as a facilitator, giving order and form to the participants' voices, collective experiences and world view, while trying as much as humanly possible not to interject their own presence into the study. A second common strategy is that of collaboration in which the historians' and participants' perspectives and interpretations are shared and the work ends up the product of their mutual education. When interviews are strong, much of the contextual narration can be done away with. When they are not, the directors must write more than they would have preferred. Whatever the final outcome, the dilemma of voicing can be formidable.

I don't believe the compilers of Brass Valley ever succeeded in resolving which strategy they would adopt. As a consequence, the book reads too much like history written and assembled by a committee. It is a competent but uninspired cobbling together of overextended materials. In their failure to use a style that would have engaged reader interest and impelled the story forward, the compilers have risked finding themselves in the paradoxical position of being condescending, however inadvertently, to the population they meant to honor. The elementary and flat style of construction and the weak quotations could easily lead the unwary or unsympathetic reader to infer that these people and community historians are a boring lot (something we community/oral historians know not to be the case).

For all its failings, Brass Valley is an innovative and thought-provoking book. One especially nice aspect is the inclusion of photographs of each of the interviewees--again evidence of the editor/compiler's respect for and interest in the lives of their interviewees.

Overall, I think both Workers' World and Brass Valley are more interesting for what they represent than for what they accomplish. They are both testaments to the profound influence that oral history is having upon the study of American labor and social history, so impelling historians towards an even greater interest not just in the lives but also in the values and self-perceptions of the men and women who worked in the nation's industries. They both demonstrate the youth of oral history and community studies, and provide important examples of the problems and challenges that



large enough to purchase and maintain video recorders/playback machines for as many as four or five different sizes of videotape. Costs for duplicating and processing all of these videotaped materials for public service may be prohibitive.

To make matters worse for historic preservation work, manufacturers have shown little inclination toward standardizing video recording formats. At present, two formats of 1/2-inch videotape are offered. While Beta format by Sony was first on the market, Mitsubishi's VHS format has surpassed it in popularity. Several major appliance lines now offer both of these types of video equipment and tapes. For oral historians, this is most confusing; no one wants to videotape an oral history interview on Beta-format tape only to discover that the designated repository has only VHS playback equipment--or no equipment at all. This potential problem should cause oral historians, librarians, and archivists to consider common ground, understanding, and setting standards in the near future. Unfortunately, it may be too late; historians already are using video rigs of every conceivable type. Further complicating this situation is the fact that, to offer long-play capability, both Beta and VHS machines may not be purchased with motors that operate at various speeds. Thus, the same videotape may be used to record one, two, four, or sometimes six hours of interviews or programs. Such variety in the video industry may cause consternation among historians and archivists.

Even more profound problems exist for oral historians interested in videotaping interviews. An oral history interview results from the collaboration of both a researcher and an interviewee, or narrator. Why videotape one person and not the other during an interview? The integrity of the document may be compromised if only half of the interview "team" is photographed and recorded. To have as complete a video record as possible, perhaps more than one camera should photograph the interview. Ideally, one should focus on the interviewee, one on the interviewer, and one on both in the same picture. Videotaped oral histories might make use of split-screen photography and display, showing interviewee and interviewer on the same video monitor. The practice of videotaping only part of the interview scene will probably frustrate meticulous scholars. Problems are also inherent in situations in which multiple interviews or multiple interviewers are present but not all are shown during videotaped sessions.

Disconcerting to oral historians and archivists alike is the gradual loss of picture quality that occurs when a videotape is replayed. Loss of image and physical quality of tape are in direct proportion to the number of replays. Thus, duplication of video oral history interviews to provide public service copies and retention of the master video recordings to insure a preservation copy are imperative. Far less is known about the life expectancy of videotape than is known about the longevity of audiotape. Any deterioration of color or image quality in stored videotape will be disillusioning to scholars and a serious problem for archivists.

The video equipment itself may become obtrusive in oral history research. As small as current video field equipment is, it may never be totally inconspicuous, and it may preclude an atmosphere of intimacy between the participants. Some interviewees, conscious of the presence of the video equipment, may play to the camera, and thereby give affected performances. The same danger exists, of course, when only audio recording equipment is used, but the presence of video equipment may compound this problem. Not to be overlooked is the loss of privacy stemming from the presence of a video camera operator in an interview session. Alterations in the picture's composition caused by an overly zealous photographer may be disconcerting to scholars. The interviewee may become distracted by the equipment or operator and focus his attention on the recording process rather than on the interviewer and the questions of the day.

Videotaping oral history also has its ethical pitfalls. With video, "the eye of the camera never blinks," as journalist Dan Rather has so aptly put it, and that eye is capable of exhausting even the strongest of persons. An oral history interviewee whose recollections are being recorded by audio equipment need not be concerned about possibly looking tired, exhibiting poor posture, showing nervous or bored behavior,

113-year-old brick building, known as "The Mercantile," in their hometown of Billings, Missouri. They conducted a dozen interviews with people who worked or shopped in the store, collected their memories of Saturday shopping days, fires, depressions, bankruptcies, celebrations, and other memorable events. Using photographs, newspaper ads, and other items submitted by their interviewees, they documented the building's history until it was torn down to make way for a convenience store and parking lot. "Our media presentation began as a local library project, hopefully to leave some record of the building when it was gone," the students reported. "But between our project's beginning and ending we have made so many new friends among the elderly in our town, and learned so much more about the history of the community that our research has seemed more fun than chore."

All state finalists, these projects were strikingly superior in technical quality. Students took the photographs or copied old ones, arranged the slides, edited the film, conducted the interviews, and prepared the narration. They showed an ease in handling the equipment that adult oral historians could admire and envy. One problem they shared with their elders in the field was the poor sound quality of their interview tapes, which made them unusable for narration. So judges were often treated to photographs of elderly faces accompanied by tapes of teenage voices trying very hard to sound old. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't. All in all, National History Day was encouraging, for it showed there is another generation coming along that is learning to use and appreciate oral history.

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OHMAR OVERSEAS



[In past issues we have brought you accounts of OHMAR members using oral history in Grenada and Thailand. We encourage members to submit brief articles on their own experiences overseas.]

## REPORT FROM ENGLAND

by Joan Morrison

The year in England was to be quiet--a time my husband to finish his organic chemistry book and for me to plan and do research for my next project. AMERICAN MOSAIC: THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE IN THE WORDS OF THOSE WHO LIVED IT had been out for over a year. The paperback was due in the spring and I was ready to put it behind me.

Colleagues of my husband found us a cottage in the country not too far from Cambridge and we settled in on a wet grey day in November, not knowing whether to be more cheered by the hissing central heating or by the enormous roses in the garden (the roses proved to be stronger than the central heating). From our sitting room window we could see meadows, apple orchards, a small wood with oaks and beeches, willows lining a stream. In the distance were a church tower, a white farmhouse, and a cluster of cottages. Little did I know that I was looking at a landscape which for many has come to represent oral history.

For the next day when the Vicar came to call (it was that kind of village), he told me that we were within two miles of the center of Charsfield--the real Akenfield of Ronald Blythe's book. Moreover, much of the planning for the book had gone on in his vicarage drawing room. "Ronnie would sit down, have a cup of tea, and say, 'Now, whom should I do next?' and we'd go over the names of the people in the village."

In subsequent weeks, I met Ronald Blythe himself (he now lived some distance from Charsfield but often came to visit) and a number of the villagers who appeared in the pages of the book. In January I went to the funeral of the old district nurse who is such a memorable character in it, and later in the year I met the outspoken sheep farmer and some of the local gentry. I shopped at the village store, visited the primary school, tasted cakes at the Women's Institute Christmas sale, and watched farm laborers shearing sheep and chopping turnips. It was like stepping into the pages of a familiar book--as in fact it was.

Many of the villagers had appeared in the film version of "Akenfield" directed by Sir Peter Hall which was an enormous success when first shown in England. It opened the 1975 London film festival and was seen by over





servicemen in Egypt during World War II. The material was interesting and new to most of the audience, but there was a very lively discussion after he played some of his tapes which revealed him asking leading questions and correcting his informants. No blows were exchanged but feathers were definitely ruffled.

Incidentally, the conference was amazingly cheap by American standards. It was held during spring vacation and conferees were housed in student dormitories (pleasant single rooms with washbasin--bathroom down the hall). Total cost, including registration, meals, and accommodation was less than \$50.00 and British Rail offered cheap conference fares for those who purchased their tickets one day in advance.

Not all oral history in Britain, however, is concentrated on the lower orders. One day I visited the Imperial War Museum in London where there is a wide-ranging collection, still being added to, of interviews with British army officers from World War I to the present. Included are a number of unedited and crudely transcribed tapes of interviews with British military and administrative personnel who served in India before 1948. Lists of all these interviews and copies of some may be obtained from the Museum.

As in the United States, government cuts have resulted in reduced support for the social sciences in Great Britain. However, oral history programs have not been affected a drastically as might have been expected, according to Paul Thompson of the University of Essex and others with whom I discussed the situation. Apparently, considerable numbers of teenagers are being trained to help with oral history research under the Youth Employment and Job Training Schemes and this has kept some existing programs afloat--a silver lining to the dismal unemployment figures.

During the year I had the opportunity to visit a number of English universities. Professor J.R. Pole asked me to speak on my work at the evening history seminar of St. Catherine's College, Oxford. My topic was American Immigration but the questions later (after a butler had served drinks on a silver tray) focused mostly on oral history as a research tool. Apparently this was the first time many of the students had encountered the technique and they seemed intrigued and stimulated by its possibilities. Several of them expressed the hope that they might use

it in their own research. I later learned that there was no oral history work being done at Oxford (although I understand that Ruskin College there has since set up an experimental oral history/local history program).

From Oxford I went to the University of Warwick in Coventry where Professor C.H. Hennessy had asked me to speak to his class in Immigration. As an industrial center, Coventry is a mecca for many foreign-born workers in England, and the city is encountering many of the problems of turn-of-the-century New York. Professor Hennessy was in the process of setting up an oral history program to explore the experiences of the new immigrants and he and his class were a most interested (and informative) audience. I learned a great deal during my unexpectedly curtailed day. British Rail was on strike and the last train was suddenly announced for 4:30 p.m.

Later in the spring I went to the University of London to give a talk at the Institute of United States Studies. Professor Maldwyn Jones, the leading British expert on American immigration and Dr. Esmond Wright, Director of the Institute, were my hosts, and when I met them for sherry before my talk, I found them both ashen-faced and shaken. News of the sinking of the British naval ship Sheffield with heavy loss of life in the Falklands had just been received. "I never thought they could do it," and, "I didn't realize those Exocets were so powerful," were the two remarks that stick with me. It was a sobering reminder that if even a "little" war can hold such surprises for historians, what might be in store for us in a full-scale conflict?

Just before we left England, I returned to Hull to give the opening lecture for a course in American immigration taught by Professor Philip Taylor ("The Distant Magnet"). He had wanted me to give some excerpts from our oral history narratives to introduce his students to the human drama behind the facts and figures they were to be studying in the coming year. It turned out to be a very successful approach, and I have been asked back for a repeat lecture. Perhaps other subjects--World War II, the Depression, the Japanese relocation camps, etc., would benefit from this sort of introduction. Another use for the growing treasure-house of oral history files which we are all filling.