

MEASURING UP TO MARTHA;

SETTING STANDARDS IN ORAL HISTORY

Spring 2001 conference: April 6, 2001

At the Maryland Center for the Creative Arts

Since 1969, Martha Ross has been the sparkplug for oral history activities in the Mid-Atlantic region, through her oral history, teaching and professional activities. Her warm smile has welcomed generations of new oral historians; her high standards have challenged them as well. A native of Alabama, Martha arrived in the Washington, D.C., area with her husband and growing family after World War II. Martha Ross embarked on her oral history career in 1969 when she entered the "Developing New Horizons for Women" program at the George Washington University, after her sixth child entered first grade. Searching for a field that would interest her and using her journalism experience, Martha wrote a paper on the exciting new field of oral history. She had become interested in the field after hearing about the slave narratives recently published by the Library of Congress. Martha was then challenged to do an oral history of the women's professional development program at GW and develop a course on this new methodology. After teaching for three semesters, she entered the graduate program in history at the University of Maryland. Her

M.A. thesis was a history of the Department of History at the University of Maryland and was based on her extensive oral history interviews with the department staff. She was also asked to develop an oral history seminar there and continued as a faculty member until the mid-1980s. Through her well-known seminar, Martha set high standards for the profession and guided new practitioners into the field. Known for her superb teaching skills, Martha has been called upon to teach oral history workshops all over the world. She also completed several landmark oral history projects, including one for the Department of Labor. *(turn page for more on Martha)*



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COME VISIT ANNAPOLIS!

Annapolis was founded in 1649. If you walk along the old brick sidewalks much as George Washington or Thomas Jefferson did, you'll see much of what they saw in the days when Annapolis was the Capital of the University States. Architecturally, Annapolis boasts some of the finest 17th and 18th Century buildings in the country, including the residences of all four Maryland signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Check the city's website for more. <http://www.ci.annapolic.md.us/visitors>, or check out www.hometownannapolis.com.

WHERE CAN YOU STAY TO ATTEND THE CONFERENCE?

Valerie Pawlewicz is the local arrangements chairperson and she has made some reservations at two places downtown. Her email address is [pawleve@tsa.si.edu]

These are:

GIBSON'S LODGINGS IN THE LAUER HOUSE

110 Prince George Street
Call (410)268-5555 for reservations*

Rooms have been reserved for both Thursday, April 5, and Friday April 6. The price is \$59 plus tax for the reduced OHMAR rate. This is located in the heart of the Historic District and is one block from the city dock.

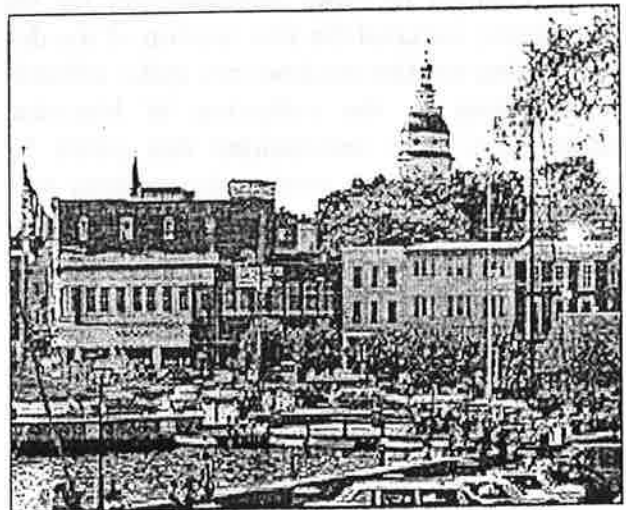
**Stipulation: You must reserve your room by March 1, 2001, or the rooms will be released and not reserved for OHMAR members.*

Photos from Annapolis: Top: Queen Anne's Church, Bottom: Annapolis City Dock.



GETTING THERE DRIVING DIRECTIONS TO THE Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts

From points north, take I-95 south to 50 east. Get off at exit 24, downtown Annapolis. At the second light take a right on Taylor Ave. Follow Taylor to a traffic circle. As you traverse the circle, take the 3rd spoke, West Street, going east, or going downtown. Take the first right (Amos Garrett). Take the next right and you'll see the Maryland Hall one block ahead. This road dead-ends at the hall.



“famous dead white males.” Daspit then revealed how he engaged the imaginations of his students in Baton Rouge and New Iberia, Louisiana, by involving them in neighborhood oral history projects. He later developed his techniques into a publication titled *Talking Gumbo: An Oral History Manual for Secondary School Teachers*. Daspit sees gumbo as a perfect metaphor for oral history since the best recipes are not written but passed down through families and they often use leftovers “to make a little go a long way.” Later in the day, Toby Daspit was named recipient of the first Betty Key Award for outstanding oral history educators.

Following a midmorning break, educators who had advised some of the student projects described in the earlier session offered their perspectives on those same efforts. Andrea Hammer, a member of the English faculty at St. Mary’s College, explored some of the larger themes of the Slackwater Project. In 1940, 98% of the local population made their livings from working on the water or by cultivating tobacco. With the expansion of the naval station in Lexington Park, Maryland, by the 1960s, 68% of the county’s economy was defense oriented. Today, tobacco and the seafood industry account for only 3% of the workforce. This enormous cultural upheaval has provided rich material for her students to explore in their interviews. Their research has created an “ample and robust” archive full of field notes, records of telephone conversations, question sets, verbatim transcripts, and edited transcripts. The students have also created a multi-volume *Slackwater Journal* that has attracted an audience among both the indigenous population and newer residents who want to understand the heritage of the region.

Judy Gullede and Christine Alyce Capaci, science and English teachers from Northside Middle School in Norfolk, Virginia, then described the Pennywinkle Project where they took a group of eighth grade students to Smith Island, Maryland, to conduct thirteen interviews. Not only did the students learn by

doing, they also saw a thirty-point jump in their test scores following the excursion.

During the lunch break, Elaine Eff turned over the leadership of OHMAR to incoming president Donita Moorus, who then introduced the winner of Pogue Award for 2000, Elizabeth Clark-Lewis of Howard University. Dr. Clark-Lewis then described her work examining life among long-time residents of Washington, D. C. and noted the educational advantages the city offered for African Americans. She also pointed out that the solid base of community activism in DC prepared the way for the Civil Rights movement.

Most of the afternoon session was devoted to a teleconference surveying the national perspective on “Oral History in the Classroom.” David Sidwell at Utah State University asked provocative questions about how oral historians can coax narrators to tell better, more engaging stories. Linda Wood and David Reville of Brown University demonstrated the 1968: *The Whole World Was Watching* Project that incorporates film, English, and speech curricula into a multifaceted web page at <http://www.stg.brown.edu/projects/1968/>.



Deborah Gardner and Dave Whetzel

The target audience for the project is high school students and teachers. David Whetzel of Cumberland, Maryland, reported on a project recalling movie theaters in Allegany County, Maryland, that he and twelve students

IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP.
USE THIS FORM TO RENEW AND ALSO TO REGISTER FOR THE
CONFERENCE AT THE Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts, Annapolis

APRIL 6, 2001 conference

Conference Registration for April 6 Conference only:

Members \$35.00 _____
Non-Members \$45.00 _____

Reminder: You will need to reserve your room in Annapolis by March 1 directly.
The phone number of the Gibson lodgings is (410) 268-5555.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL.

Individual \$20.00 _____
Student \$10.00 _____
Institutional i \$50.00 _____
Life Member \$200.00 _____
Contribution _____

TOTAL _____



Make checks payable to OHMAR and mail to:

Lynne Humphries-Russ
Membership Secretary
P.O. Box 201
Ellicott City, MD 21041-0201

Please add the following information for us to check our records.

Your NAME _____ Institution _____

Street Address _____

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