

2007 POGUE AWARD GOES TO ELAINE EFF

These are excerpts from an interview with Pogue Award Recipient Elaine Eff, conducted by Roger Horowitz at her home in Catonsville, Maryland, on June 27th, (*Discussion of her family, life growing up in Baltimore, her college education at [Case] Western Reserve University, studies abroad in Spain and earning a BA in International Affairs and Spanish from George Washington University, her initial employment experiences in New York and Boston are detailed on her full slightly edited transcript that can be found online at www.ohmar.org.*)

OHMAR: What do you enjoy the most about what you do?

EFF: Going from an idea to a finished product. That is what I absolutely love the most, hearing someone's idea and emerging months or years later with a tangible product, whether it's an entire museum, an exhibit, a book, a film, or a tour. I love seeing the tangible.

I had a great experience the other day. I was at the opening of the Gibson Island Museum where I was a consultant. I gave them my thoughts on how it would be a more effective tool for everyone in the community. Two and a half years later, I got the invitation that the opening was on June 22nd. I just planted seeds. I had said to them, "You've got to determine what stories you want to tell. What are the stories? People want to find themselves in this museum and this space. They don't want to just look at pictures of boats and houses and look at awards. They want to see themselves." They organized this entire museum around stories.

OHMAR: Discuss the Deerfield Landscape Basket?

EFF: I did this project for the Radcliffe [College] Institute on a very, very obscure basket type that came out of Deerfield, Massachusetts, called the Deerfield Landscape Basket. No one had ever looked at it since they were made in the early 1900s, a women's craft movement of the 1900s.

I had actually [re]discovered a forgotten form that had gotten lost over time and commingled with Indian baskets. I was finding baskets on the auction block that they were calling "Indian baskets" and got them for historic Deerfield, a museum of decorative arts and colonial homes. That was probably my first real experience connecting an object to people.

OHMAR: You had this great experience but you still stayed outside the field for a few years as you served as a consumer advocate. What finally pushed you into this new profession:



Past President Roger Horowitz presents the 2007 Forrest C. Pogue Award to Elaine Eff.

EFF: A newsletter came to me from [my alma mater] George Washington University one day and it announced that there was a three-week seminar in American Folklore to be held in northern Virginia — very intensive: traditional arts, music, story, spoken word, sung word, you name it. I said, "This is the stuff I do, what I love, what I'm enjoying." I signed up.

Every great folklorist in America came in. John Burrison, the authority on southern pottery; Terry Zug, the authority on southern pottery; Alan Jabbour, who became the head of the American Folklife Center, a world class fiddler.

I got to meet all these people. Both Henry Glassie and Kenny Goldstein, who were very instrumental in programs, one at Indiana and the other at Penn [University of Pennsylvania] said, "You've got to get a Ph.D. You're a folklorist." I said, "Ph.D.? No." I was now six years out of GW. They said, "You need to go to Cooperstown."

OHMAR: Tell us about Cooperstown?

EFF: Cooperstown was a master's degree program in museum studies and folk art. So I go up to interview and they say things to me like, "Well, Baltimore — you must know the painted screens."

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The **Forrest C. Pogue Award** is named for the military historian Dr. Forrest C. Pogue (1912-1996) who pioneered the use of oral history interviews to compile battlefield histories. Pogue taught for several years before joining the historical section of the United States Army during World War II. He later was appointed director of the George C. Marshall Research Center and then directed the Marshall Library and Marshall Research Foundation. In 1974, he was named director of the newly established Eisenhower Institute for Military Research at the Smithsonian and continued in that position until his retirement in 1986.



Deerfield landscape basket

PRESENTERS' BIOS

BRIEN WILLIAMS

Dr. Williams is an independent oral historian and video producer. He holds a Ph.D. in radio, television, and film from Northwestern University, and has taught media production and produced documentary and oral history programming at George Washington, Indiana, American, and Gallaudet universities. Since 1985 he has produced and conducted audio and video oral history interviews for a wide range of clients including the Veterans History Project of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian Institution. Brien has also produced, directed, and written video productions for a variety of government and educational organizations including the Smithsonian Institution and National Park Service. Between 1998-2005 Dr. Williams was the historian at the American Red Cross where he directed a national oral history program designed to capture, pre-

serve, and use the stories of Red Cross staff, volunteers, and clients.

LAURA KAMOIE

Dr. Kamoie is an Assistant Professor of History at the U.S. Naval Academy. She holds a Ph.D. in American history from The College of William and Mary. Though trained and published as an historian of Colonial America, Laura became involved with oral history through her public history work in Washington, D.C. She directed the Public History Program at American University for five years, which included teaching oral history, overseeing graduate students' oral history projects, and conducting community-based research projects in D.C. that frequently included oral history components.

GLENN WHITMAN

A teacher at St. Andrews Episcopal School, he has been conducting The American

Century Project (www.americancenturyproject.org) with his students for the last fourteen years. He is also the author of *Dialogue with the Past: Engaging Students and Meeting Standards Through Oral History*, published by American Association for State and Local History as well as numerous articles on the use of oral history as a historical and educational methodology. In 1997 Whitman's work was honored by his earning the Oral History Association's Pre-Collegiate Teaching Award.

FRED STIELOW

Dr. Stielow is currently the director of Virtual Libraries at the American Military University. He was previously the Dean of libraries at the American Public University System and the director of the Walter P. Reuther Labor Archives at Wayne State University in Detroit. ■

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I kind of looked at them cross-eyed and decided that this was really interesting. I could not get officially into the program because it had a rigorous application process that was long past. But if I was ready to come to Cooperstown, they would get me a job in the museum and I could take classes so long as I sat in the back of the class, which was cool.

I got a job in the collections at the New York State Historical Association, which has one of the premier American folk art collections.

I was working in the curatorial department and this was 1974 when it was the vogue among museum curators to separate paintings from their frames. We now know that the frame is part of the document. They were getting thrown away. While I was going through the frames, I'd pull out one and I said, "What are the window screens doing here with the paintings?" I picked it up and I looked in just the right way and I see this monochromatic image of a pastoral idyllic scene in black and white. It's a painted screen. I went to Baltimore. I started doing my research on the painted screens of Baltimore and that became my folk art paper.

Students gave their final presentations at the end of the semester in Cooperstown. I came up last and I give my paper on painted screens. It was completely unexpected. It was all field based, in other words, it wasn't based on documents or certain paintings, like others' had been. The presentation was over, and everybody looked at me and said, "Who are you? Where did you come from? The director of the folk art museum (now American Folk Art Museum in New York City) comes up to me and wants to publish my work.

I had applied to officially be accepted into the program. Since it was a dual program, I decided that I would complete the folklore

program one year and then the next year I would complete the museum studies.

During the summer between my first and second years I was placed with the Georgia State Arts Council to do field work for the first of what became the first state folk art exhibition. I was in on the ground floor and invited to do some survey work in southwest Georgia. I got to work with the likes of Bert Hemphill. Gil Ravenel, the head of design at the National Gallery of Art, was a consultant. Some of the people I discovered, their work is now selling for thousands of dollars.

My last year of Cooperstown, I did a thesis on trucker's culture. Driving from Baltimore to Cooperstown and back I'd always listen to the radio and I got into trucker songs on the country and western stations. I would stop at truck stops. The next thing I know, I convince the Smithsonian Institution's Festival of American Folklife to do a whole exhibit on truckers culture, and I'm organizing it. Of course, I was smart enough to know that that was my master's thesis.

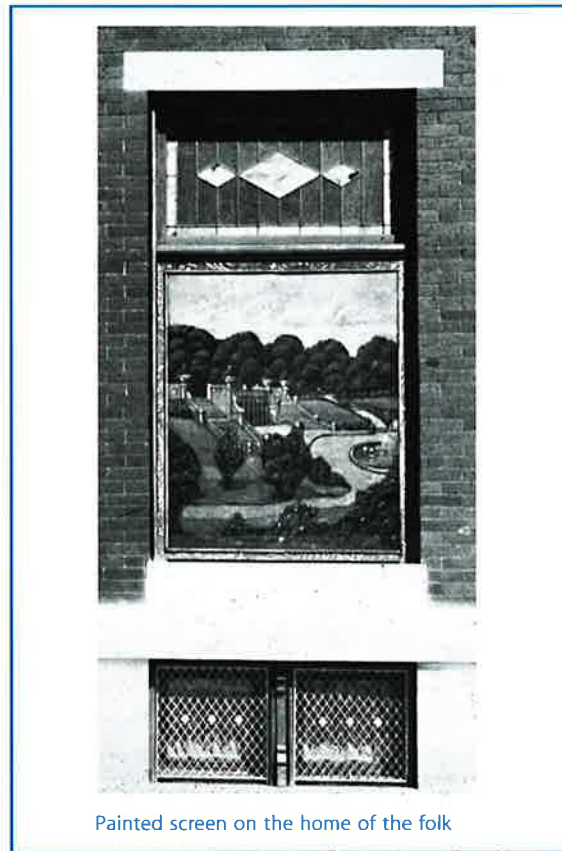
OHMAR: You graduate from Cooperstown, finish your work on this truckers exhibit, then you start a new job at Winterthur.

EFF: Winterthur Museum had decided that it was going to do a folk art exhibition. This is one of the premier house museums in America, owned by Henry du Pont near Wilmington, Delaware.

It was the beginning of a career in "Great-Collections-of-American-Folk-Art-Go-Fish." That's what we did at Winterthur. It was an exhibition that was to be premiered at the Brandywine River Museum in Chad's Ford. It was the absolute chestnuts of the collection,

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Painted screen on the home of the folk

things that were world renowned, everything from kases (armoires) painted blanket chests, Pennsylvania German, rugs, pottery, metalwork, glassware — you name it — frakturs, all collected by Mr. du Pont mostly in (19)30s and 40s.

At the opening night, many of the people came from all over to see what Winterthur had done, to see their collection come out of the shadows, because 365 days a year these objects sit in room displays in the mansion. It was a bit of a blockbuster.

OHMAR: One would think this would get you some recognition?

EFF: On opening night, a woman comes up to me and says, "Would you like to get a Ph.D.? [A colleague] has recommended you for a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to study folklore. Are you interested?" I selected the University of Pennsylvania. Penn was where all the great folklorists had come from and you would get a rigorous education. Also Henry Glassie had just moved there from Indiana.

So I started at Penn in '79 and no sooner do I get there than the Smithsonian knocks and says, "Would you do a show for us?" They wanted to do a show just like Winterthur. I said yes. I literally moved between Penn and Washington. It got to a point where I had to take a leave to focus on the exhibition.

While I was at the Renwick, the heir of the inventor of screen painters, Richard Octavek, dies of a heart attack. Gone. It was 1979 and I was working on the Renwick exhibition called "Celebration: A World of Art and Ritual." It was going to be a stellar show, but I realized that I had more important work to do.

When Octavek died, I contacted the Baltimore Museum of Art about an exhibition. They said, "Absolutely." They funded me to do research. The Celebration exhibit went on in other hands and opened a year later. I put my energy into the screens.

It was kind of one of the first times in my life that I realized what was important and acted on it. I discovered remarkable links of the screens to that one screen that I had found in the New York State Historical Association collection in Cooperstown. I had uncovered a hidden history of screens that went back to the 1700s, and it was time to get it all down.

We had something unfortunate happen, and the exhibit didn't happen, but the catalog was written. I asked them if they minded if I turned it into my dissertation. I finished up at Penn in '83-'84, came back to Baltimore when I finished my coursework to finish up the research.

OHMAR: Congratulations Dr. Eff. Now what?

EFF: I lived in several different places in East Baltimore which were kind of the ground zero for painted screens. I had discovered dozens of painters, befriended many people, and did a census of the screens.

So my life had been spent in that area in East Baltimore. It was one of Baltimore's most stable neighborhoods — 99.7 percent white ethnic comprised and primarily of elderly women, because they had all outlived their husbands.

I went to the groundbreaking for a new senior center, where a school that everyone had gone to had been torn down. I recommended that this should be a place where painted screens are showcased and I happened to get the ear of the mayor's first assistant and suggested, "What this city needs is a folklorist." In October of '85 I became the Baltimore City Folklorist.

OHMAR: Talk about your work in Baltimore.

EFF: We had some amazing projects doing oral histories and documentation projects on major thoroughfares, like North Avenue and major institutions, like the Lexington Market. It was a wonderful opportunity for people to realize that they were valued and to give back to the community through public programs and events. We worked on an ethnic guide to Baltimore and worked very closely with the Greek community and did a huge exhibit at the Baltimore Museum of Art on the Greek community.

OHMAR: In your online interview you discuss some filmmaking projects. So how long were you the Baltimore folklorist?

EFF: My gig lasted to '89 when Mayor Schaefer became governor and said, "Do what you've done in the city for the state."

So in '89 I actually created the same job at the Maryland Historical Trust, the state preservation agency. We really saw folklife documentation and living traditions as something much broader than the folk arts, which is why we called it "Cultural Conservation. The program was designed to be community based.

I'm no sooner on the job, I said, "I can't call myself a folklorist, a Maryland folklorist, if I haven't been to Smith Island." In May of '89 I went with a couple of folklorist friends from Washington to Smith Island. We stayed for two nights.

Twelve miles off the shore of Maryland, Smith Island is a completely isolated community with roots back to the 1720s. It was a watermen's island. We stayed for two days, went to church on Sunday, met people and ate incredible food. It was one of the seminal experiences of my life as a folklorist.

In July of 1989 [my first weeks on the job] I get called into a meeting at the Secretary of State's office — "Smith Island wants a museum." I was going to be the point person in interpretation. I walked out of the meeting, wrote a grant to NEA for a film and interpretive materials, and we got it. I returned to Smith Island to hear what they wanted. Of course, meeting people in Smith Island is unlike any other place. They have a distinct brogue.

We started our visit with a film from the American Century, a television show from the 1950s hosted by Walter Cronkite called "The Singing Oystermen." He went out on a skipjack in the winter oystering with these Smith Islanders who would sing. They would sing primarily gospel, religious songs.

Then we all talked about it. The question was, what do you want people to know about you if you're going to have a museum on your island? So what resulted was a museum, a Smith Island Center that opened in 1996. The showcase, the centerpiece, is a film called "Land and Water, People and Time: The Smith Island Story." It is 100 percent in the voice of the islanders. There is no narrator. Nobody needs to speak because it is their story and they can speak it.

That's what my life as a folklorist, and belatedly as an oral historian, has really been. When people would say, "We're going to hire somebody to be Jennings Evans and to tell his stories about what a skipjack captain does," it's like, "Why aren't you bringing the islanders? That person has a voice. There is a person in that community who speaks for him or herself and ultimately for the whole community in a larger sense." I am very opposed to

what the museums call "living history," what I call dead history. It's taking the words off of living people and putting them in the voice and the costume of an actor, when we know that there are people who are alive and well and can speak for themselves and tell their stories in a way that will never ever, ever be more impressive on an individual than anything else.

We were doing an architectural survey of all the lighthouses of the Chesapeake Bay. I said, "What about the people?" So we did oral histories of all the lighthouse keepers. They are gone, every one of them now.

Other projects came from all over. Ultimately we started a grant program. We gave non-capital grants. As much as \$50,000 went to [a single community] communities to research, capture, and tell their stories and to hire professional oral historians and to hire professional documentary photographers to make films, to do books, to do thoughtful tours and brochures that really reflect the peoples' voices.

In 2001 we created Maryland Traditions, which is the partnership with the Trust and the Maryland State Arts Council. We merged all expressive culture based on traditional culture in the landscape, both performance, the arts, occupation, living traditions, cultural community documentation of all kinds, under the same umbrella.

I'm happy to say that seven years later we are looking at an incredibly successful program that was built on small partnerships with institutions like the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, St. Mary's College, the Ward Museum, Frostburg State University, the Baltimore City Heritage Area, and so on.

When we had our culminating event just a week ago in Baltimore, we literally filled the house all afternoon with people from the entire state. We gave an award for Achievement in Living Traditions in the Arts called the ALTA Award, named after Dr. Alta Schrock of who was the [unclear] folklorist out a in Western Maryland.

OHMAR: What's left for you to do?

EFF: I have one dream left to write the book, create the permanent document on the painted screens of Baltimore and their ancestors all over the world. A big surprise to everyone, I think, when they see how big the tradition is and where it comes from in the decorative arts worldwide and take it up to date on what has happened since the 80s when I did my dissertation. I just was in Las Vegas for the first time and I saw the world's largest painted screen on the entire façade of Bally's Hotel. It was a billboard for the show "The Producers," and I am so excited to have seen it and photographed it, and to know that what happened in Baltimore in 1913 is something that goes back so far and will keep coming forward into the future. ■

OHMAR

Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region

Established in 1976, OHMAR is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and improvement of oral history in the Mid-Atlantic region, and serves both professional and amateur oral historians, librarians, archivists, teachers, folklorists and independent researchers in Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia.

Each year, OHMAR sponsors two public forums — a fall workshop and spring conference — and produces two newsletters, one in the early fall, the other in the early spring. The deadlines for ads and submissions to its Spring 2008 newsletter is **January 15, 2008**. Send all information to the newsletter editor: dwinkler@navyhistory.org.

Membership is for the calendar year. Benefits include newsletters, advance notice of, and reduced fees to, OHMAR events. For more information about membership, contact Constance Strickland at cstrickland@navyhistory.org.

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