

FORREST C. POGUE AWARD

In its continuing efforts to recognize and promote high standards in the field of oral history, OHMAR, in 1979, created an annual award for outstanding and continuing contributions to oral history. The award honors Forrest C. Pogue, who pioneered oral history in combat during World War II and who served as an early president of the Oral History Association. In 1998, the winner was the Washington Press Club Foundation for "Women in Journalism", a project which interviewed outstanding women journalists active between 1910 and the 1990s.

Washington Press Club Foundation Receives Forrest C. Pogue Award

Abigail Trafford, Washington Press Club Foundation board member and health editor of the *Washington Post*, accepted OHMAR's 1998 Forrest C. Pogue award for the Washington Press Club Foundation's Oral History Project on "Women in Journalism." The project collected life histories from 56 women journalists. OHMAR members **Margot Knight**, **Fern Ingersoll** and **Donita Moorhus** served as project directors. **Anne Ritchie**, who conducted interviews for the Women in Journalism Project, interviewed **Abbie Trafford** following her acceptance speech at the fall meeting in Gettysburg.

AR: From your perspective as a woman journalist, what has the Women in Journalism Project meant to you?

AT: What it means to me is that we have these stories of pioneer women reporters. It's like having friends in history because these oral histories of women--their work and their lives--and give us a total picture of what it's like to be a woman journalist. They become

our friends, it's much more accessible than reading a straight-forward article about these women. Because I'm a woman and a journalist, there's so much that resonates for me.

You realize that all of our stories are quite similar. Except that these are extraordinary women and extraordinary journalists who really made a mark. That's why they were chosen for the oral histories. In a sense they were all outsiders trying to get inside, so what they faced in that challenge and what they faced as women and human beings and in their personal life, all has meaning today and will have meaning tomorrow. It has meaning for future journalists.

AR: One thing that struck me in your talk was your mentioning how generous the women were who did the oral histories. I thought of Isabelle Shelton whom I interviewed. I had a key to her home. She set up her study with her scrapbooks and I could go in and use the scrapbooks. The interviews went over several months. That's just one example of their generosity when they participate.

AT: Absolutely. Sharing your private thoughts as well as your public past is incredibly generous. And they shared this. They also shared their personal struggle. You don't just have the outside events of their lives. You have the internal struggle that they went through. This is an amazing gift. When you think of general history books it's very hard to know people inside. I'm thinking of an analogy--take Abraham Lincoln and how he struggled with his historical events. We get at his personal struggle from letters and other people's observations, but just think if you had an oral history and he was able to talk about what he was thinking about. Of course, there's much more of a record on public people, public figures like Abraham

Lincoln. All of these women aren't public figures. They are just extraordinary women doing a job. We don't have outside sources to find out about their lives and how they did their jobs, but these oral histories let us come into their lives, come into their homes, come into their hearts. I think that is very generous of them.

AR: In a way they put themselves out in what they wrote but they also had their private lives. It's that part of their lives that come out in the oral histories--what it was like to deal with the family when they had a job that was demanding.

AT: Absolutely. What is it like when your marriage is falling apart and you're on assignment and you have an editor who wants you to rewrite a story at deadline. What does that feel like? Now these issues are the same for men as well but I think they are of particular interest for women. I am partial to that historical view because of my daughter. She is a reporter with AP. These stories will help her realize how important it is to build the chain from one generation to the next. These stories are wonderful firm links in that chain.

AR: Why do you think your daughter went into journalism?

AT: You know, I don't know. She grew up in a house of journalists. Her stepfather is a journalist. She didn't show any interest in college but when she got out of college and she went to San Francisco she ended up in the *Bay City News*, which was a city wire, and she just loved it. It's something about the life and something about the people. I think a lot of it is the people. This is another thing that these histories show--there is a particular type of person that is drawn to journalism. That's exciting to tease out, which you can in these

oral histories, because you get to know them as people not just as journalists.



Left to right: Donita Moorhus, Fern Ingersoll, and Abbie Trafford of the Women in Journalism Oral History Project. Photograph by Don Ritchie.

AR: Why were you attracted to journalism?

AT: I love a story. I realize that there's nothing like a story that just lifts me along. I did start out with the Apollo moon landing story, which was a great story. I love to read. If I pick up the paper I love to read a great story. I'm not so interested in "the Department of Agriculture announced a new program for chickens yesterday." I like the stories that go beyond the news, beyond the events, and reveal what people's lives are like. There are so many great stories out there. I think most journalists are that way.

What is so intoxicating is the challenge--working terrible hours, going to unbelievably queer places, having an invasion of your personal life. If you're really going to be a journalist it's very hard to have a normal 9 to 5 job. Everybody wants balance in their life but you may not get it all at once. There are times in your life that are not balanced. How do you face that? How do you confront it? How do you make choices? I think since I've been doing it for a while, what I would say to my daughter and what I say to younger colleagues is that you don't have to do it all at once. You have to think in terms of a long

career. These issues are also dealt with in the oral histories and are helpful to women.

AR: How were the women selected for the project?

AT: There was a committee and there was a great deal of debate. There were enormous amounts of debate! We wanted to get the best but also wanted to get the representatives. As Fern Ingersoll pointed out [in the discussion following Abbie's talk], we wanted to get women who were in large newspapers and broadcast stations and women in little newspapers. We wanted to get women: African American, Native American and other minorities as well as white women. We wanted to get a geographic distribution. We wanted to use these histories as a snapshot of a much bigger picture rather than many stories of women who were quite similar.

The hard part in deciding the list was that there were more candidates for a certain type of life than for the broad representation. How you chose them were hard decisions. This is not to say that these were the best journalists in the world. We are saying that these are representative journalists who have given their time to let us know what it was like to be a journalist in their era.

AR: You mentioned in your talk that the interviews are available on the World Wide Web.

AT: They are available on the Web. Some of the women said that they did not want their interview to be available on the Web so they aren't, but by far the majority are on the Web. The collection is also housed in universities, over 20 university libraries have the collection and this is a great resource. It means that almost all the journalism schools have a full collection of the transcripts. Some of the interviews have videos. So if you are a student in journalism, this is a gold mine. I

would say it is a must. You should read some of them to find out what this profession is about.

Also if you are a historian looking for a particular event, like coverage of the civil rights movement, these interviews are very helpful because they show how particular journalists saw that story. If you are looking into women in professions or women in general, these are a gold mine of sources. What we [the Washington Press Club Foundation] want is to make it broadly available. We want everybody to know about this project and for it to be used.

It's like taking a trip and finding out about a woman and her life. I can just click on this interview and find out these amazing things about this human being. I encourage everyone to do this. You've got a friend here: that's the bonus of oral histories.

AR: Were you on the Board during much of the project?

AT: Yes. It had started when I got on the board and then I was president when we completed it and had the celebration. It was a wonderful project and it was something new. We had never done something like this before. I think it's a signature for the Foundation and our work, and again speaks to our mission. These oral histories are really important.

AR: How did the WPCF come to be?

AT: It was originally the Women's National Press Club, founded in 1919. And guess why? Women were not allowed in the National Press Club. It went along like that for a while. Then in 1985 the National Press Club and the Women's Press Club merged. Women can belong to the National Press Club now. I belong, so that's not an issue. But we wanted to keep the Women's Press Club, which was then renamed the Washington

Press Club, we wanted to keep that spirit alive because it had a function. It was sort of a beacon to those who are not always in the majority. We felt that was important to continue. Even now in newsrooms, the buzz word is diversity, and certainly there is much more diversity in newsrooms. But as my daughter said, "please point out to everyone there [at the OHMAR meeting] that I'm the only woman in this bureau."

AR: How many are in her bureau?

AT: There must be four or five. That includes photographers as well as writers.

So the Washington Press Club Foundation was formed and we had some assets and the idea was to help people get into this field, and help them when they are in the field. We have a dinner every year, the Congressional salute dinner, which is a black tie dinner, and we raise money. The money goes into scholarships at journalism schools and internships. It's very important to support young journalists coming along, both students and then those who have just graduated and are starting out. But a key part of our mission is also chronicling the experiences of pioneer women. We felt that they had a special story to tell even though it's been spread out over years. They have a story--both of the historical sweep of what's happened to women in this country and they have a wonderful human story to tell of how individuals fit in to these broad historical sweeps.

AR: In your talk you also mentioned journalists interviewing journalists. Why did you have oral historians do this?

AT: Well, I think this is a debate. What we do for a living is interview other people. We wanted to interview women journalists and we wanted to get their stories for history. Your immediate response is: "Terrific, I'll do

that Saturday morning. We'll just interview someone. We know how to ask questions and get all the information." Of course we're journalists--we tell stories. The thing about oral history is that it's a distinct field. Oral historians have different techniques, they're interested in different kinds of things, and if you want to do an oral history you are better off having an oral historian do it.

So it was pretty clear. We did understand that we wanted to get oral historians to do it and make it an oral history project. Sometimes this was hard because as journalists we think: Why didn't they ask that, or whatever? But we also understood that if you want an oral history then you have an oral historian do it. And the results have been spectacular. Now where you want journalists or writers, they can take this information in the oral history and tell a story or write a book. It doesn't cut us out at all. What it does is give us a real basis to go forward and then tell stories as we tell stories.

AR: Do you think there's any chance that the project might continue or pick up at another point?

AT: This is totally personal, so I am not speaking for the Foundation, but I personally think it would be a very good idea if we could find a way to institutionalize continuing the project and doing one or two oral histories a year, and somehow raise the money for that and get that going. There's a great debate--is it more efficient to do a whole lot all at once. But I think we're beyond that. We've established a repository of these great stories and we ought to continue. There are some people maybe we think we've missed or we might want to get now. Again, this is part of our mission--it's giving people who are coming into the field some friends in history that they can turn to. We ought to keep doing that before the pioneers are gone.

This award is terrific because it gives us the sense that "Hey, we've really done something spectacular, let's continue it." The professional recognition is very important.

AR: Do you have anything else you'd like to say about the project?

AT: I just think it's a wonderful technique to record history. As a storyteller, it's a gold mine of information, to take that forward and write more stories. It's another way to approach reality. I think we should encourage it. The Washington Press Club Foundation is honored and fortunate that we have this resource that has been created. I hope people use it. I want it to be lively. I want people to turn to it. I want people to write books from it, really use it and know about these women's lives.



INTERNSHIPS AVAILABLE

The **Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum** is conducting an oral history project to document the occupational folklife of the crab pickers of the Eastern Shore of Maryland including their technical skills, specialized terminology, traditions, and material culture—in audiotaped interviews, black and white prints, and color slides.

Internships are available on this project, all of which provide housing and a stipend of \$125 a week. Requirements include: ability to translate and transcribe interviews in Spanish; organizational and communication skills, archival and transcribing experience a plus. MA or graduate level coursework and fieldwork preferred. Responsibilities include translation during interviews, transcription, logging, and indexing of tapes, project

correspondence and telephone contacts, research, public program development.

Internships available Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter 1999. Send a resume to :
 Director, Center for Chesapeake Studies,
 Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, P.O.
 Box 636, St. Michaels, MD 21663.

**ANNUAL TREASURER'S REPORT
 November 1, 1998**

Beginning Balance, Oct. 31, 1997
Crestar Bank \$4,606.34

Income:
 Membership 778.00
 Conference income 2,815.00
 Contributions 100.00
 Advertising 25.00
 Sales 226.00
 Interest 76.12
 TOTAL \$4,020.12

Expenses:
 Printing 471.88
 Mailing 160.00
 Stationery & Office exp. 15.55
 Food \$2,242.65
 OHA pamphlets 144.00
 Pogue Award 317.64
 Miscellaneous* 865.00
 TOTAL \$4,216.72

Current balance, Oct. 30, 1998
Crestar Bank \$4,485.29

*\$75 for fall conference meeting room, \$190 for travel reimbursement and honorarium for fall conference speaker, \$500 OHMAR contribution to Buffalo conference, and \$100 for spring 1999 conference meeting room.

Cindy Swanson
 1998 OHMAR Treasurer