

Fall 2006

Voices from the Caroliniana - Fall 2006

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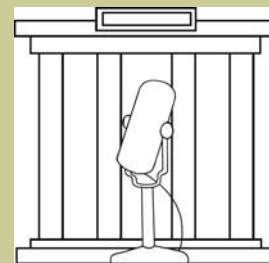
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Voices From the Caroliniana



The Newsletter of the Oral History Program at the South Caroliniana Library

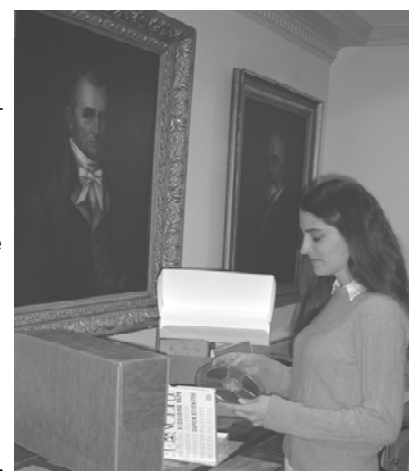
Greetings

Welcome to the third newsletter of the Oral History Program at the South Caroliniana Library. As we approach our second anniversary, just a few months away, we are delighted to have the chance to thank our donors, narrators and patrons for their dedication and generosity. With major initiatives underway in nearly a dozen areas, we are enthusiastic at the progress we have made and grateful for the opportunity to serve the Library and the researchers from around the world who come to the Caroliniana to work with its unparalleled collections.

We continue to move forward on our current projects, restoring extant recordings from our holdings and completing new interviews for several collections. Two of these, Carolina First and South Carolina Jazz and Blues Musicians, are slated for inclusion in books, both currently scheduled for publication in 2007.

Just as interesting are the interviews patrons donate, and we are excited to report on four recent acquisitions: the Fritz Hamer World War II Interview Collection, a set of broadcast interviews conducted by Rev. William M. Shand, the William Gravely Collection of Oral Histories on the Willie Earle Lynching, and the Vennie Deas Moore Oral History Archive, spanning decades of work on the African American experience in South Carolina.

Oral history methodology can be applied in surprising ways, and our Processing Interview Program is designed to enhance our understanding of traditional collections accessioned by the Library. Other outreach efforts are being planned as well. With so much work going on across campus, the Oral History Program is preparing a survey to



Processing Specialist Kathryn Graham examines a recently accessioned collection that includes

better assess the University community's needs. It will also serve as the template for a statewide survey to follow next year. If you have a question or donation, though, you need not wait to hear from us—we're always eager to hear from interested patrons and donors.

Nicholas Meriwether

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Surveying Oral History on Campus and Around the State

As it heads into its second year, the Oral History Program is launching several new initiatives, including enhancing its outreach efforts. With increasing numbers of interviews being donated by faculty members here and at other USC campuses, the Program is researching how best to assist interview-based research projects. "If we can provide help and information before faculty and students

begin their interviews, we can enhance the utility and even the significance of the results," explained Nicholas Meriwether, Oral Historian at the Caroliniana.

Several departments have already benefited from class presentations on oral history methodology and issues. With so much interview-based research happening on campus and

around the state, the Oral History Program is finalizing a census of that work to assess what services would be most helpful. With help from experts trained at the University of Maryland Office of Survey Development and USC's University Instructional Services, a census of current work will be launched shortly, to be followed by a more extensive, focused statewide survey next year.

“As a seven-year-old boy living next to the Pickens County sheriff, Gravely had vivid memories of that time ...”

Whispers of Outrage: Oral History and the Willie Earle Lynching

On February 17, 1947, a mob of white men broke into the Pickens County Jail and abducted 24-year-old Willie Earle, an African American arrested but not yet charged in an attack on Greenville cab driver Thomas Watson Brown. Earle was later found stabbed, beaten and shot to death just inside Greenville County; Brown died that same afternoon. Considered the last race-based lynching in South Carolina, the crime sparked a firestorm of national outrage and cast a pall over the state. For Dr. William Gravely, emeritus professor of religious studies at the University of Denver, the horror of the lynching fueled a scholarly quest that consumed more than two decades of work. As a seven-year-old boy living next to the Pickens

County sheriff, Gravely had vivid memories of that time, but only began to recall them in 1981. Although the outcry helped secure the passage of the state’s first explicit anti-lynching law, and then-Gov. Strom Thurmond supported the investigation and prosecution of what was the largest number of people ever put on trial for lynching in the country, all 31 defendants were acquitted—despite confessions from 26 of them. Early in his research, Dr. Gravely realized that the written record was only a tantalizing outline of the facts, and he began to track down residents who remembered the trauma. Although he didn’t consider himself an oral historian at first, the power and significance of the stories his narrators shared

made him realize that oral history offered the most effective methodology for collecting and preserving that often-whispered testimony. Now, with his project completed, he has donated his interviews and transcripts to the Oral History Program at the South Caroliniana Library. “Justice was not done in the Willie Earle case,” explained Dr. Allen Stokes, Director of the South Caroliniana Library, noting that despite a civil rights investigation by Federal officials, no further charges were brought. Now, almost sixty years later, Dr. Gravely’s oral histories have captured many of the voices that would otherwise have been lost, remedying some of the tragic injustice that marks this sad chapter in South Carolina history.

Vanishing Folkways: The Vennie Deas Moore Interview Archive

When Vennie Deas Moore began researching surviving West African folk medicine customs, she knew that interviews would be important, but she did not imagine that she was embarking on a second career as an oral historian. “I didn’t even know that there was such a field,” she recalled recently, “but I knew for sure that what I needed to find out would not be written in libraries.” More than twenty interviews later, she had her story, eventually leading to an article published in the *Washington Times* magazine. From then on, Moore knew that there was no substitute for going out into the field and conducting interviews. Over the next two decades, she would record hundreds of hours of interviews for museum exhibits,

articles, pamphlets and books, for her own scholarship as well as for projects sponsored by local and national heritage organizations.

Now she has donated those interviews to the Oral History Program, to be converted into formal oral histories and made available as part of the Caroliniana’s collections. “We are delighted and honored to have the opportunity to conserve these priceless materials,” said Nicholas Meriwether, Oral Historian, “and we are excited to see the topics and voices they will add to our holdings.” Some of the interviews record the migration of African Americans from South Carolina to Washington, D.C., and the ways they preserved their culture and heritage far away from the Low-

country; others capture the struggle to desegregate South Carolina schools that resulted in one of the landmark court cases combined in *Brown v. Board of Education*. One particularly moving set of interviews documents the unique and imperiled African-American communities on Sandy Island, threatened by development. Not all threats are man-made: Moore was conducting interviews in her native McClellanville when Hurricane Hugo struck, causing extensive damage there and throughout the state. She was fortunate, escaping with her precious cache of tapes, just as we are fortunate to have her working with us to conserve these stories and make them available to future generations of scholars.



Scholar Vennie Deas Moore’s interviews span decades of work on African-American history and culture in South Carolina

Remembering World War II: The Fritz Hamer Oral History Archive

“Ever since I was a youngster, I remember a fascination with stories my parents and grandparents told of their life during World War II.” With those words, Fritz Hamer, chief curator of history at the South Carolina State Museum, begins his evocative portrait of Charleston’s experience during the tumultuous days of World War II, an era which witnessed the rebirth of South Carolina’s oldest city.

Hamer’s fascination with the war first produced an exhibition at the State Museum, opening Dec. 7, 1991, and led to his dissertation on the topic at the University of South Carolina. With its successful publication as a book, *Charleston Reborn: A Southern City, its Navy Yard, and World War II* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2005), Hamer turned his attention to the archive he had assembled

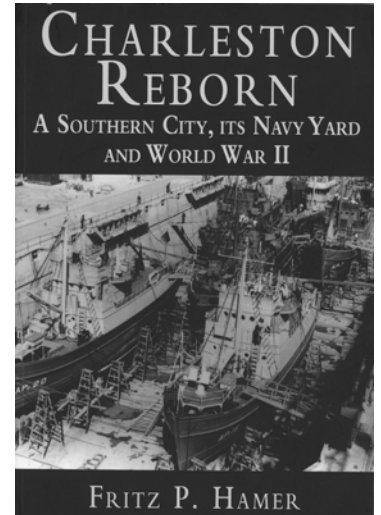
during his research, leading to his recent donation of a substantial cache of materials to the Oral History Program.

His interviews are unusually noteworthy: most are traditional oral histories, but Dr. Hamer’s conviction that oral sources would provide important perspectives often missing from the documentary record bore fruit in interesting ways. One session with his dissertation director in a restaurant turned into a lively conversation with two other patrons on historiography and race relations; they didn’t cover much of the dissertation, but as he recalled, “it gave me new insights into how history is written and debated by not only historians but also the public at large.”

Some of the stories he uncovered dispute the rosy-eyed reminiscences of a nation united

against fascism, but they all contribute to our appreciation of that time and the challenges it poses for our understanding of the complexities of a monumental war effort that placed unique strains on the fabric of American society.

And to South Carolinians, Hamer’s work reminds us of the vitality and importance of recent history, especially for the state’s most gracious city. “Historians of the state have remained captivated with earlier periods,” he wrote, “but it seemed that much of what Charleston has become today originated not in these earlier eras but in the 1940s.” Now, with the donation of his interviews to the South Caroliniana, researchers will have access to the unexpurgated stories that vividly recreate that era and all of its turbulence, for Charleston and the country as a whole.



The cover of Fritz Hamer’s *Charleston Reborn*, his recently published book that drew extensively from his oral history interviews

Broadcasting History: The William M. Shand Radio Interviews

In the mid-1970s, William M. Shand was completing his graduate work in history at USC and working as the news director for WQOK, a Greenville radio station. Now an Episcopal minister, Shand at the time was contemplating a career as a writer or journalist, and at the suggestion of a friend at ETV, he decided to start a radio show called *Bookbinders*, featuring interviews with notable South Carolinians.

When WQOK closed its doors, Shand decided to donate his old tapes to the Caroliniana, where they are being restored and transcribed as a collection in the Oral History Program. A few months ago, Rev. Shand shared his recollections of those interviews, describing the circumstances surrounding

their recording and providing vivid details of his meetings with politicians such as Joseph Biden and authors such as Pulitzer Prize-winning biographer Dumas Malone.

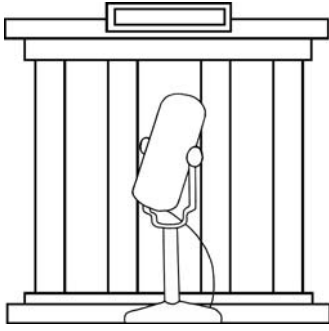
As a journalist with training in history, Shand believed that the sound of those voices would be useful: “It would be nice to know what Calhoun sounded like,” he recalled, sitting in the Kendall Room at the Library where a large portrait of the famous statesman hangs. Shand’s interests were not just political: at the urging of his friend at ETV, he sought out South Carolinians who combined historical research with literary elocution.

Some were topical: when he spoke with former USC graduate student Marion Lucas, it

was to discuss the burning of Columbia, the subject of Lucas’s dissertation which he had just revised for publication. The interview with Dumas Malone, whose magisterial six-volume biography of Thomas Jefferson is considered a landmark in historical research and writing, is the crown jewel of the collection, spanning three reels, much of which has never been heard.

Although some of his interviews were edited, the tapes he donated are all but unexpurgated. “Each of those tapes has a story of their own,” Shand noted. Thanks to his foresight and generosity, those stories will now enrich the understanding of an even wider audience than those who tuned into WQOK, thirty years ago.

“Each of those tapes has a story of their own ...”



Voices From the Caroliniana

The Oral History Program
South Caroliniana Library
University of South Carolina
Columbia, SC 29208

Phone: 803.777.3133
Fax: 803.777.5747
E-mail: MeriwetN@gwm.sc.edu



Oral History Program Spearheads Processing Interview Initiative

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but to an archivist responsible for processing a collection, a cache of cryptic documents or unmarked snapshots can be maddeningly mute. Although the Oral History Program concentrates primarily on full-length oral histories, it handles a range of materials, including less expansive recordings. Now, as the Program approaches its second anniversary, it is putting the final touches on its newest endeavor, a targeted interview program designed to enhance our understanding of recently donated collections.

With the addition of Terence Johnson as field archivist for the Caroliniana, the Program is spearheading an initiative that will interview donors about

items in their collections, adding an additional level of information about these valuable artifacts. "Imagine what we would learn if donors such as Mary Chesnut had annotated her diary for us," mused Henry Fulmer, Curator of Manuscripts, "and imagine the stories we might be able to capture on tape if we could talk to her about the way she went about revising it." And these focused discussions could easily lead to more in-depth interviews, or even full-fledged oral histories.

"Oral history as a field is increasingly aware of the importance of ancillary material, such as pictures, to flesh out narrators' stories," Nicholas Meriwether, Oral Historian, remarked. "Our Processing Interview Program carries that think-

ing to the next level: applying oral history methodology to the curation of traditional archival materials." With the new Processing Interview program, the Library adds a vital dimension to its accession procedures, and continues to position itself at the forefront of cutting-edge technologies and practices.



Manuscripts Specialist Graham Duncan examines a new collection in preparation for a Processing Interview