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SWLA Receives NEH Grant for Oral History Project

The National Endowment for the Humanities has awarded the Southwestern Library Association a grant of $177,982 to develop and demonstrate a model for public libraries to present public programming in oral history.

The eighteen month project began January 1, 1980. Citizens in eighteen communities of the Southwest will gain a better understanding of their local history and its implications for the future through a series of public programs based on oral history materials. Librarians in these communities will be trained in the techniques of managing oral history projects, utilizing community resource persons and creating, collecting and organizing oral history materials. Based upon the experience of the eighteen libraries a model will be developed.

The project will be supervised by Susan K. Schmidt, the Executive Director of SWLA. A project director will be appointed to administer the project activities. Serving as consultants to the project are Dr. Ronald Marcello, Executive Secretary, Oral History Association, Dr. Waddy Moore, Director of the University of Central Arkansas' Oral History Office and Kathleen Dannreuther, Project Director of “Sonoran Heritage”, a NEH Funded program at the Tucson Public Library.

The Advisory Committee will assist in the selection of the model libraries, review project activities and may visit some model sites during the year. Asked to serve on the Advisory Committee are Dr. Tuffly Ellis, Executive Director of the Texas State Historical Association, Sandra Esquibel, Head of Reference of the New Mexico State Library, Dr. Bernard Fontana, an ethnologist at the Arizona State Museum and Jane Kenamore, Head of Archives at the Rosenburg Library in Galveston.

Oral History in Latin America

The development of oral history in Latin America has its own peculiarities. There is no doubt that, one way or another, oral history (with or without a tape-recorder) has been in practice for a long time. We can say, too, that the purpose of saving oral information and producing first-hand sources dates back to the effort made by the chroniclers of the Conquest, who understood the need to rescue in situ the experience of the cultural shock that took place in the interchange between the Spaniards and the Indians. This does not discard nor minimize the task that oral translation or collective memory has meant for the safekeeping of our past. Later, with Independence, this eagerness to narrate
daily events also appears, although with some factionalism. But it was not until recent times, with the schematic and organized work of different groups of social scientists concerned with the preservation of different types of information, that the strict concept of oral history emerged. Naturally, there is a need to place sources within some type of structure, since otherwise they might be hopelessly lost; yet it is also a matter of verifying, determining, clarifying or correcting the information on the life processes of contemporary man. All of this would be integrated in its own private universe, framed within a theoretical conception and a definite ideological position. In other words, we aim to preserve the testimony of the happenings of our Latin American countries, beginning with mass history.

Thus, individual and institutional projects arise, which as the years go by, especially since the sixties, grow in nations such as Argentina, Brazil, Peru, Cuba and Mexico, without forgetting, of course, the work the Chicanos have done in the United States and which, by the right bestowed upon them by their cultural roots, form part of this unifying concept.

As in North America oral history sometimes goes beyond the researcher’s field, whether he is an historian, an anthropologist or a sociologist, and the works on the use, the application and the results of these tasks are acquiring unsuspected proportions. We also consider it important to mention the publications that refer to our area as well as general information on those materials that are pertinent, in general, to oral history.* On countless occasions, works edited in Spanish and Portuguese go unnoticed in the English-speaking academic and intellectual world, due to their infrequent translation. Another reason is that such books only reach national markets; also, in extreme cases such as that of Cuba, its overwhelming editorial production seldom reaches us because of the blockade she has suffered during these last years.

Undoubtedly, we are not only concerned with what is our own, what is Latin American, but also with what is published about our nations in other places and in texts published in Spanish, which perhaps in their original version (either French or English) had not reached us. We are preoccupied by the image brought “from outside” concerning what is ours, what is close to us.

A tendency will be observed at first sight in almost all the texts reviewed: that of recreating history in popular processes, or liberating movements, opposed to the position of other nations, other cultures and undoubtedly other ideologies that direct the effort and purpose of oral history to elites, whether political or economic, and to the rebuilding of historical periods of men’s lives as a function of “what is outstanding”
and "who is outstanding," and not of the common man, who after all is the very essence of history.

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*Guía de proyectos de historia oral sobre Iberoamérica. México, Archivo de la Palabra, INAH, SEP. In print.

Ethnicity and Immigration

A conference on Ethnic and Immigration Studies: The State of the Art will be held at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, May 28-31, 1980. The conference is being sponsored by the Multicultural History Society of Ontario, an institute devoted to research, publication, and archival collection.

The thirty-five conference participants from Europe, the United States and Canada include scholars, community leaders and government officials. Papers will be read at four sessions on ethnic studies and academic disciplines—sociology, history, oral history and folklore; roundtable discussions will be held on ethnic history societies, on institutes of migration and ethnic studies, and on government and ethnocultures. The conference will conclude with a half-day symposium on the future of ethnic studies in the university and community.

Among those participating are: Jean Burnet, professor of sociology, York University; Jorgen Dahlie, president, Canadian Ethnic Studies Association; John Higham, professor of history, Johns Hopkins University; Bernard Wax, director, American Jewish Historical Society; Rudolph J. Vecoli, director, Immigration History Research Center (Minnesota); Raymond Breton, program director, Institute for Research on Public Policy; Ronald Grele, research director, New Jersey Historical Commission and editor, International Journal of Oral History; Linda Degh, professor of folklore, Indiana University; George Pozzetta, president, American Italian Historical Association; Gianfausto Rosoli, director, Centro Studi Emigrazioni (Rome); Lawrence Koziarz, director, Ethnic Heritage Studies Program (Washington, D.C.); Olavi Koivukangas, director, Institute for Migration Studies (Turku, Finland); Orest Kruhlak, Multiculturalism Directorate (Ottawa); M. R. Lupul, director, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (Edmonton, Alberta); W. Isajiw, professor of sociology, Uni-