Oral History From Four Perspectives

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INTRODUCTION

Civilization is built on them [source materials]. The building keeps going on as knowledge expands, is stored, evaluated, refined, redefined, and passed along through myriad channels from generation to generation.¹

Although not speaking of oral history, Bruce Catton may well have been credited with providing an overview to that newlydeveloped corollary of history. Collecting of oral memoirs, for the purpose of supplementing historical documents, has been developed, defined, refined, evaluated, and transmitted through one generation into another.

Many paradoxes surround the range of oral history activities from the interview through its use by the researcher. The process is as simple as the conversation captured on tape; it is as complex as the methods used to edit and later to provide access to that material. It is as economical as a cassette tape; it is as expensive as the salaried personnel who process the interview. The interview may take only an hour or two; its publication may take years. The product of the interview may become incorporated into fine literature, or it may be reduced to trivia for a variety of reasons.²

Paradox also underlies the formation of oral history. When the telephone condensed distance and the human voice could

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directly transmit its thoughts and needs, men gradually relegated the written word to secondary position. Fewer documents, that now could be considered immediate to an important moment in history, were recorded. In time, Allan Nevins deplored this condition and sought for a means to overcome the problem. His eventual use of the recorder to capture those times, previously left unrecorded because of the convenience of technology, proved that the monster technology could be domesticated. The harnessing of such power for the good of man has become so dominant within the oral history movement that its newest designation is "Audible documents of research of archival value." The very technology that created the need for oral history has also provided the instruments for collecting its materials.

History books have been our traditional means for studying the past. However, a great deal of sifting has taken place in such material. Scholars have studied an historical event, presented as well-rounded and objective a view of the time as possible, printed it, and given it to others for study. Literally, students receive a third-hand account of history.

"Oral history vividly illustrates that what a man remembers is his own truth." The capturing of that truth in as objective a manner as possible, with sincere attempts to give as full a picture as possible, is the primary concern for oral historians. True, oral history is created for the researcher, but that is not its only value. It is also a capturing of the culture and traditions of a community; it can also be a teaching tool for persons in a wide variety of disciplines. It is an effective means of establishing strong public relations between oral history centers and corporations, communities, universities, blue collar groups, and individuals who have directly shaped society. Oral history interviews have suggested to the narrator the intrinsic value of his own life. The interviews have supplied authors with multiple insights so essential in creating their works. Like mercury, oral history has measured the climate of the times but has eluded attempts to grasp and hold it within a rigid structure.
Whatever its use—historical, literary, scientific—oral history material is always channeled through the spoken word. And the timing of the interview to capture such memories is as paradoxical as the other aspects of oral history. To interview too soon after an important event may be to gather material that lacks perspective. To wait too long may be to sacrifice memories that are fresh, perhaps even more reliable.7 Seldom will moments be just right; the important point is that they be captured in as documentary a manner as possible.

This paper, therefore, embraces four dimensions in the oral history movement that has mushroomed into even international proportions. To place the aspects of the movement within a proper perspective, an investigation into the growth of oral history will first be presented. Then the contributions of the Oral History Association as it has granted both freedom and discipline to the growth of oral history will be examined. This will be further refined by an investigation of other attempts to implement the work of the Association. Then the all-important problems of access and control of the multiple resources housed in so many centers throughout the United States will be investigated. Emphasis will be placed upon present trends and materials. Lastly, since the years of growth have also been years of recurring problems, a section is set aside to acknowledge not only their presence but also the diversity of approaches that many oral history centers are using to alleviate the consequences of these problems. Solutions are not offered; possible approaches to lessen their consequences are.

But no study is complete without a retrospective view which can also initiate some form of evaluation. Hopefully, the appraisal of the past will have permitted some valid speculations into the future of oral history. The rapid advances in technology and the multiplicity of events that have been shaped annually by important people and others who are affected by those events, offer an urgency that invites a response from all oral history centers. And hopefully, from the four areas of investigation as well as from the conclusions reached,
the truths and the ironies inherent in the following statements will become clear and understandable polarities. "The editor’s pencil often sterilizes the interview into a pallid, but factual, skeleton of its former, lusty self" and "No glass renders a man’s form or likeness so true as his speech."

I

THE VISION OF ALLAN NEVINS

Forty years ago an idea was conceived. Ten years passed before it was born. Adolescence arrived thirty years later. The parent was Allan Nevins, the birthplace Columbia University, and the offspring Oral History. In retrospect we can admire the concept and marvel at the many other offspring that have also been born in imitation of Nevins’s idea. Since imitation IS the most significant form of praise, the hundreds of programs that have continued and expanded the Columbia project rightly prove the truth that the proper study of man continues to be man.

In 1938 Nevins envisioned recording the lives of significant persons. This interest had its basis in his actual experience ten years earlier. In preparation for writing his biography of Grover Cleveland, Nevins interviewed several persons who had served during Cleveland’s administration. However, “historians a generation earlier had not taken the trouble to interview Cleveland and his associates before they died. How many questions they might have asked.”

The value of such interviewing from Nevins’ historical-literary point of view was not immediately shared by others. The Ford Foundation declined the opportunity to fund such an enterprise. The chairman of the history department at Columbia saw little cause to budget for such a work, declaring it a “waste of time and money.” The library administration at Columbia did not know how to classify oral history transcribers according
to the pay scale of the library and seriously questioned the merits of such an enterprise.

Not to be daunted, Nevins wrested $6,000 from the Bancroft Fund, a bequest to the library for the purchase of books and manuscripts related to America. Nevins recognized a creative correlation with oral history, and oral history was begun. On 18 May 1948, Allan Nevins and his student, Dean Albertson, gathered in writing—the tape recorder came later—the memoirs of George McAneny, an important civic leader and reformer in New York. The Table of Contents for that interview indicates that only four topics were discussed. The transcription itself shows only McAneny’s comments but no questions by Nevins. Neither were editorial insertions made, and the index includes proper name only.

From his initial use of direct transcription during the interview, Nevins next tried the recording advantages of the dictating machine, which he soon replaced because of its expense and often inaudible recordings. Then he experimented with the wire recording, which proved slightly better but presented new problems because of uneven sounds and snagged wires. However, even greater problems remained to be solved: finances and personnel. Nevins knew that those who would assist him in the interviewing process must be able to elicit the confidence of each important narrator in order to obtain the best possible interview. Such interviewers should be specially trained. In addition, at least $36,000 annually would be needed to maintain this oral history program on a scholarly basis. From the Bancroft Fund the library could supply only a quarter of the needed monies. Therefore, Nevins turned to foundation grants offered by such groups as Mellon, Carnegie, and Littauer. He also accepted special commissions from various corporations to record the oral memoirs of their leaders.

With other groups like the Book of the Month Club joining in this fledgling enterprise, the oral history movement at Columbia University expanded rapidly. Eventually members of the Carnegie Corporation itself were interviewed extensively;
the proper noun index to that project is one hundred fourteen pages of double-columned entries. Later the Eisenhower Administration Project captured for future historians the memoirs of persons involved with that administration. In that way, future historians would enjoy the type of information that Nevins had earlier desired for his work on the life of Grover Cleveland. Thus the scope of the Columbia oral history program continued to expand. Subject areas as diverse as the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama and the creation of Children’s Television Workshop can be found within the vast collection housed in the manuscript room in the Butler Library at Columbia University.

The decade of the seventies helped to realize the desire of Allan Nevins for competent interviewers. In 1973 the Carnegie Foundation financed the first of a series of oral history courses at Columbia co-sponsored by the departments of Library Science, History, and Journalism. Applicants are screened, interviewed, and only then selected. Those chosen are trained and then made responsible for both initiating a special project and seeing it through to full completion.14

These confirmations of the Nevins' dream were celebrated at the thirtieth anniversary luncheon on 26 May 1978. There the announcement of the cooperative venture between the Columbia project and the Dictionary of American Biography was made. The American Council of Learned Societies pledged its support for this venture which would involve Columbia’s gathering the memoirs of notable persons likely to be included in the Dictionary. In tribute to Nevins's concept and Columbia’s continuing fulfillment of that vision, the comment was made:

No matter what its form, oral history is now believed to have a permanent place in American scholarship. Its usefulness was underscored by the fifth supplement to the dictionary published last November—of the 556 listings, sixty percent had to be produced without collections of letters or papers.15

Just as the project grew at Columbia from one interview
on 18 May 1948 to over four thousand interviews with 450,000 pages of transcription as of October 1978, so the concept burgeoned in other parts of the United States as well. In 1954 the University of California at Berkeley opened the first multi-purpose oral history center. From 1965 to 1971, the total projects in the United States grew from 89 to 230; projects in the planning stages mushroomed from 7 to 93; hours recorded leaped from 17,441 to 52,264; and pages of transcript expanded from 398,556 to 704,543. The Oral History Association has attempted to keep up-to-date statistics, although more centers and more interviews exist than may be indicated from such compiled information. Many community libraries or historical societies are gathering their own local history using the oral history methods. Since some of these groups are not presently affiliated with either the Oral History Association or their own state-sponsored associations, their holdings are not recorded by those gathering the statistics.

In contrast to Columbia’s eclectic approach to the selection of its narrators, most of the other universities with oral history projects tend to narrow their focus. Notable among these university-based oral history centers in the United States are the following: UCLA with transcripts on the movie industry and California’s water problems; Princeton University and its John Foster Dulles Project; the University of Texas with focus on both the oil industry and the career of Lyndon Johnson; and Cornell University with its emphasis on agriculture in New York. In addition, the University of California at Santa Cruz has developed the history—social, cultural, but primarily economic—of Central California. Claremont Graduate School, having used Allan Nevins as an initial consultant, collects “research material by conducting interviews with persons whose experiences merit preservation.” Wayne State has an on-going project related to aging “with special reference to memory retention, forgetting, accuracy, free recall, and interviewing older persons.” Michigan State concentrates on the civil rights movements. The University of California at Berkeley deals with significant contributors to the development of the west.
Tulane has a New Orleans jazz archive, integrating its oral history materials with correlative items such as sheet music, phonorecords, photographs, etc.\textsuperscript{18} And the University of North Carolina, with its unique traveling three-act drama, incorporates oral history techniques into its audience-participation segment of the presentation.\textsuperscript{19} These projects are representative of the wide range, both topically and geographically, of oral history programs in our nation’s educational institutions.

Advances in historical preservation through oral history took new directions in the early 1960s. Within three years of each other, the staffs of the Presidential Libraries of John F. Kennedy, Harry S. Truman, and Dwight D. Eisenhower began using the oral history techniques. The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library soon followed their lead. Corporations such as Ford Motor and Carnegie have also preserved extensive memoirs of persons ranging in responsibilities from corporate leadership to household maintenance. Another noteworthy collection has been the William E. Wiener Oral History Library in New York City, which has hundreds of oral history transcripts delineating the American Jewish experience in the twentieth century.

On the national level, an extensive oral history continuing project is the Coal Miners Research Project. It has a “charter membership of scholars and archivists affiliated with institutions located in most of the nation’s major coal-producing states.”\textsuperscript{20} Many persons involved in these various programs look to the University of Vermont for guidance in developing their own collections. That university offers summer workshops with fifty hours of instruction and field work. Under the direction of Charles Morrissey and Amelia Fry, the students are led to learn inductively. The course spans the entire oral history process from practice interviewing to the complete transcription.

In addition to providing methods for gathering information and creating transcripts of the interview, the oral history approaches have served additional purposes for researchers and historians. Various contemporary authors have profited from the
recorded materials which the father of oral history, Allan Nevins, had yearned to study when he wrote his biography of Cleveland in 1932. Studs Terkel collected and edited numerous interviews for his classic but controversial *Hard Times* and his earlier work *Division Street America*. Several scholarly works relying on oral history sources are T. Harry Williams’s *Huey Long*, Forrest C. Pogue’s *George C. Marshall*, Cornelius Ryan’s *The Last Battle* and *The Longest Day*, and Oscar Lewis’s *The Children of Sanchez*. Pulitzer Prize winners who have used the Columbia oral history collection for their research have been Robert Caro for *The Power Broker*, Joseph P. Lash for *Eleanor and Franklin*, and Barbara Tuchman for *Stilwell and the American Experience in China*.

In addition to authors, preservationists have also found oral history resources valuable. Research for restoring colonial Williamsburg was begun in 1955. Many of their taped interviews help to document the various decisions made during the restoration process.21 The group of persons responsible for the restoration of historic Savannah consider oral history as a valuable tool in guiding many of their decisions. For these southerners, story telling has always been a common medium. Their preservationists are now using that talent, documenting reasons underlying architectural choices, ways in which families have lived, and feelings and opinions within various ethnic neighborhoods. This information has helped the city in its restoration rather than destruction of landmarks.22

On a smaller scale, such organizations as the American Medical Association, Field Enterprises, and the Wood Library of the Museum of Anesthesiology have collected in-house oral histories. Then in 1970, Elizabeth Balanoff of Roosevelt University developed over 130 hours of tape on the labor movement in Chicago. In an attempt to unify these diverse programs, Thornber proposed the Consortium as a middle strategy between Columbia with its “high volume interviews and its unpolished final transcripts” and Berkeley with its “fewer interviews and its elaborate final presentation.”23 The Consor-
tium would use substantial editing and indexing but stop short of a publishable document. Although this proposal never translated itself into group action, its idea remains for present or future leaders in Illinois oral history to use, implement, and translate it into practical, documentary terms.

Several movements have attempted to make oral history in Illinois a valuable tool for local communities and scholars. The First Chicago Oral History Workshop was held at the University of Chicago on 21 February 1976. Elizabeth Balanoff, together with Lon Mule from the Moraine Valley Oral History Association and Tedwilliam Theodore from Communication for Change, examined oral history possibilities in Chicagoland. Jeffrey Fiddler of Roosevelt University examined the development of courses in oral history, while Louise Kerr of Loyola University considered urban groups and oral history. The Moraine Valley Association has held annual meetings to bring system and high standards into oral history methodologies used in various statewide programs. Another attempt at organizing oral history was made by Cullom Davis at the Oral History Association Consortium at Savannah, Georgia, in 1978. Approximately fifteen participants from the upper midwest region met for a short time to consider the feasibility of starting an upper midwest conference. This organization would attempt to bring standards and methods of oral history to more programs in our respective states. The group decided to schedule time into the 1979 Consortium at Michigan State University to consider the proposal more in depth at that time. All these attempts point up the dramatic truth that Illinois has, at present, no systematic approach to the gathering or preservation of oral history, nor does it seem to be anything but fragmented in its present efforts.

Any fragmentary approach to oral history development is no real cause for alarm at the present time. Oral history is not yet an acknowledged discipline. Its value has been seen and tested; its approaches have been as varied as the professions of the narrators and the backgrounds of the interviewers;
its funding has been minimal or realistically generous. But as adolescents do, oral history will continue to grow and to be successful under the guidance of concerned individuals. Persons like Elizabeth Mason from the Columbia Oral History Center, Willa Baum with her classic manual for the sponsoring institutions, Milton Krents for his documentation of the American Jewish experiences, Charles Morrissey and Amelia Fry for their instructional guidance in the field, Saul Benison with his concern for standards, John Neuenschwander and Eliot Wigginton with their suggestions for oral history in the classroom—these and dozens of other concerned persons will continue to guide oral history towards its fuller potential and dimensions.

And future successes we can expect. The wedding of the *Dictionary of American Biography* with the Columbia project presages exciting uses of oral history in other cultural projects. In addition, the microfilming of oral history programs, identified as the New York Times Oral History Program carried out by the Microfilming Corporation of America, provides hundreds of transcribed interviews in both microfilm and microfiche. Further plans include offering selected microforms on oral history to high school libraries by providing tapes, transcripts, and study guides. Such dissemination of materials must have resided in the dream of Allan Nevins as he and his staff gathered those first interviews by hand and later transcribed them in their two-room office below sidewalk level at Columbia University.

As Elizabeth Mason so aptly stated in her keynote address at the Thirteenth Annual Workshop held in Savannah in 1978, four aspects have evolved throughout her nineteen years of experience in oral history: *enthusiasm*, as “we reduce a chaos of experience to a semblance of order”; *universality*, since this is the most interdisciplinary of the non-disciplines; *technology*, as we move from forty-pound tape recorders to cassettes and micropublication; and *balance*, as we evaluate, self-criticize, and then implement. Allan Nevins’s dream is now a forty-year-
old reality which still shows endless potential for growth as it enriches all areas of historical documentation.

II

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE ORAL HISTORY ASSOCIATION

By 1966 various approaches to gathering oral history had been sufficiently tried in different parts of the United States. The time had arrived for the refining process to be considered. Consequently, in that year the Oral History Association was formed at Lake Arrowhead, California. If Nevins’s concept was to have lasting value, it needed the discipline and the pruning that this initial group of one hundred participants was willing to give.26 Under the chairmanship of Louis Starr, director of the Columbia Oral History Research Office, this landmark meeting confronted itself with basic issues for resolution. What is oral history? How should it be used for optimum effect? Who will benefit most: the academic community? the local patron? both? Thus the aim of that meeting at Lake Arrowhead was really twofold: to begin to unify the movement and also to establish and maintain standards as guides for the various programs.

Speakers addressed themselves wisely to basic issues. Concerns of subsequent annual meetings have proved the nature of these issues to have been truly foundational: finances, problems of interviewing—transcribing—editing, values of visual as well as oral interviewing, information retrieval, preservation of tapes, integrity of standards and objectives, and foremost among them all, the attempts to define the term itself, oral history.

Twenty-eight years earlier Nevins had sketched his dream with the following verbal strokes: systematic attempt...living Americans...significant lives...fuller record. At the Ar-
rowhead meeting twenty-eight years later, principal speakers redefined the direction for the oral history movement. Louis Starr, Director of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia, favored the elite approach in the choice of narrator. Oral history is “previously unrecorded information about what, in the first instance, a couple of the more important leaders discussed between them... and, but for us, it wouldn't be preserved, it wouldn't exist.” On the other hand, Dr. Philip C. Brooks, Director of the Harry S. Truman Library, did not draw such a clear distinction but instead acknowledged oral history as a “record of the spoken word, as distinguished from documents or papers created at that time, or a formal written statement.”

Over the years and up to the present time, various writers have sought to create their own definitions of the term and have brought into a type of disciplined focus the two directions indicated at the Arrowhead conference. Patterns seem to form in the various definitions. Narrators are considered as either elite or non-elite, directions previously established by Starr and Brooks. The proffered information must have been previously unrecorded, it must be of interest to scholars, it must represent previously unavailable information, and it must be supplementary to already documented events. In short, the narrator must be a participant or so intimately connected with the event that his is a first-hand documented account.

Topics covered in the first and then succeeding colloquia tended to group themselves around certain major concerns. Definitions of the identifying label oral history became refined during the first four years. Interviewing was a consistent concern as new techniques were tried, refined, or discarded. From 1968 through 1974 the uses of oral history in the classroom were further investigated and given greater dimension. Legal considerations regarding libel, slander, copyright, and ownership of tapes seemed to recur on a three-year cycle. Also interspersed were problems of bibliographic control. The late sixties concentrated heavily on the use of visual documentation in the oral history process. And threading throughout
all the years has been deep concern for ethics, standards, and integrity. In all the material, whether open or confidential, the duty to historical truth has always been a primary concern.

From 1974 on, this adolescent movement has also tried to envision its future. One reason for this, of course, is the expansion of such programs outside the United States. All continents except Antarctica are areas of concern and guidance by the Oral History Association. The 1972 and 1975 conferences focused on South America. Asia dominated the 1973 colloquium. European programs were presented in the 1973, 1975, and 1976 meetings. Australia was viewed in 1975, Africa earlier in 1969. The 1976 annual meeting of the Oral History Association at LeChateau Montebello in Quebec, Canada, acknowledged the emergence and growth of these international offspring of the oral history movement from its birthplace, the United States.

These national colloquia, each year meeting in widespread geographical areas from Jackson Hole, Wyoming, to Savannah, Georgia, have been honored by the presence of prestigious speakers from the fields of journalism, politics, literature, publishing, and education. Alfred Knopf, Elie Abel, Barbara Tuchman, Alex Haley, Dean Rusk, and Daniel Schorr have lent their own perspectives to the value of oral history in their chosen professions. The 1978 meeting continued the same tradition: Eliot Wigginton shared his foxfire experiences through student presentations as well as behind-the-scenes pictures of life at Rabun Gap. Besides confirming the outlook for oral history as an interdisciplinary pursuit, these speakers have presented additional possibilities for using the procedure creatively.

Thus, the Oral History Association has provided the needed framework and guidance for that which could have been a maverick approach to historical research and accuracy. By taking a movement which had reached adolescence by 1966 and by bringing it to early maturity, the Association has provided a needed set of standards and a continuous source of guidance and encouragement. It has provided a framework for all facets of the program
from interviewing through preservation of the product. It has set before its reading public the insights and the visions of oral history researchers through its official publication, the Oral History Review. Formerly it included the proceedings of the annual meeting; now it contains significant articles written by members during the previous year. The Association also publishes a quarterly newsletter where topics range from up-to-date information on meetings to advances in research and publication. Its yearly colloquium has been expanded to include a workshop dealing with basic aspects of the programs, and it uses the standardbearers of the oral history field to counsel and train its initiates. It has also encouraged the publication of such noteworthy works as Gary Shumway's Oral History in the United States, a state–by–state guide to two hundred thirty collections in the United States; and Manfred Waserman's Bibliography in Oral History, which lists works published through 1975 and exposes the range and riches of vast materials and resources in oral history.

Thus, the Oral History Association can view with pride its steady growth in membership and individual oral history centers. From the initial one hundred participants at Arrowhead in 1966, the 1978 workshop and colloquium announced thirteen hundred members, an advance of 251 over the previous year. Of this thirteen hundred, the following categories are recognized: 129 institutional; 740 individual; 361 library; 65 student; and 5 life members. The Association is aware of the presence of many smaller projects that have never aligned themselves with the Oral History Association but hopefully do look to it for standards, procedures, and suggestions.

For whatever the needs, the Oral History Association has provided and continues to provide a wealth of materials to individual researchers as well as scholarly organizations. It has helped to establish standards which counter Barbara Tuchman's fears that oral history would provide "an artificial survival of trivia of appalling proportions." Yet, more importantly, the Oral History Association has confirmed its func-
tion of preparing, providing, and preserving "some of the intangibles of the past." Louis Stárr effectively reminded the Association's members that the richness of the past "wouldn't be preserved, it wouldn't exist" without the oral history projects and the guidance and encouragement of such important groups as the Oral History Association.

III

ACCESS AND BIBLIOGRAPHIC CONTROL

At the first meeting of the Oral History Association, Louis Shores predicted the necessity for bibliographic control:

Sooner or later, libraries must develop a union catalog of the oral history holdings, not only of the fifty universities with established oral history offices, but also of other agencies and sources. Perhaps among the Federal funding opportunities there is a place for a major bibliographic undertaking in oral history. Four years later Enid Douglass shared with those same members the major attempt that the Claremont Graduate School in California had made to establish a center for bibliographic control over oral history materials throughout the United States. Thus access could be readily granted to all needing such resources.

We put in a proposal to the National Humanities Foundation over two years ago. We proposed that we become a computer data bank for the United States for oral history manuscripts and that anyone, any researcher, could write to us and we could get this interview, the title, number of pages, the status of the interview . . . at a rather fantastically minimal cost. We had it all written out, I can send you copies. Unfortunately our proposal was turned down.
Perhaps an idea born before its time is destined to oblivion. In this age of the computer, with its convenience of storage and rapid transmission of information, the Claremont proposal would seem a logical approach to both access and bibliographic control of nationwide collections.

Such was not to be; however, about this same time the Oral History Association did encourage two important directions which would enhance access to and bibliographic control of oral history materials throughout the United States. The Association members learned at its second annual colloquium in Harriman, New York, on 18 November 1967, that correspondence had been made with the editors of the National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections urging them to include oral history transcripts in their catalog on the same basis as other manuscripts.

NUCMC did set down certain conditions for determining which projects would qualify for inclusion in this source. A project must have its materials in transcript form and have at least ten such writings. Fewer might be allowed however, on the basis of their historical value, research potential, or the importance of the center. Generally the materials offered by each center seem to cluster around a single subject.

Definite values attend the listing in this source. NUCMC is a respected publication for scholarly materials: it publicizes current material from all over the world; and it holds the potential of functioning as a type of union list if certain restrictions already cited could be altered.

The second impetus towards improved access and control of materials was given by the Oral History Association's sponsoring of the Shumway directory which even today is considered a landmark publication. The Introduction to Oral History in the United States: A Directory defines oral history as "primary source material in the form of tape or transcript—in many cases both—resulting from recorded interviews with persons deemed likely to harbor resolutions of interest to scholars." Within this framework, the directory offers state-by-state descriptions of two hundred thirty collections in the United
States. It provides notes on oral history projects, noting their respective methods of indexing their materials. Accurate data and a useful index characterize this greatly needed publication. Because of the vital information that Shumway provided at that stage in the development of oral history, a great advance in bibliographic control offered researchers materials available in many oral history centers in the United States up to the year 1971.

Another advance in opening avenues of information in oral history was Manfred Waserman's *Bibliography of Oral History*. This reference expands the work Shumway presented four years earlier. The *Bibliography* lists works published through early 1975 and cites several oral history catalogs. It also provides the titles of thirty-seven books based entirely or in part on oral history source material. Each bibliographic reference is given at least one subject entry.38

In the same year of 1975, Alan Meckler and Ruth McMullin compiled and edited *Oral History Collections*. This Bowker publication presents the richness of materials housed in oral history collections throughout the United States. Of all centers listed, forty-nine indicate that they do catalogue their collections. Their methods range from simple to fairly detailed: Roosevelt University in Illinois only lists its transcripts. Northport Public Library in New York uses only the card catalog; the University of Texas at Austin incorporates its oral history catalog into its annual report; while the University of California at Berkeley supplements its catalog by listing interviews by subject with some content description. These four approaches are typical of the many modes of cataloging the oral history collections housed by these forty-nine centers.

In Meckler and McMullin's work, one hundred eighteen of the oral history centers indicate various methods of indexing their collections. The San Diego Historical Society places its index on subject cards; Southern Illinois University indexes by author but includes a few subject entries in the main card index of its special collections. Purdue University Archives indexes by
name only. The Schlesinger Library in Maine indexes by name and subject but had not published its indexing as of 1975. The New York Public Library at Lincoln Center indexes its entire collection and has a finding list as well. Montgomery County Norristown Public Library in Pennsylvania places its author and subject entry information into its main card catalog. Baylor University in Texas includes its indexing in the catalog of the archives of Texas College. Tacoma Public Library uses author and subject indexing. Variations on these eight approaches by those one hundred eighteen centers were in use in 1975.

Seventy-one project centers also indicated that they have some type of interlibrary loan. Any project placing restrictions on loans offers limited access in some way: "only to University of California campuses" (UCLA); "photocopies only" (Tulane University); "abstracts only" (Texas Technical University); and "cassette checkout" (Johnson County Library in Wyoming). Only a third of the centers allow full access through interlibrary loan.

Of all the centers of oral history listed in the Bowker publication, only thirteen perform all three of the services: cataloging, indexing, and interlibrary loan. By providing this comprehensive information in 1975, Meckler and McMullin performed two vital services. They drew into sharp focus the extent of oral history collections and provided vital information that would afford greater access to the materials. Because of the oral history movement's rapid expansion, a second edition of this valuable publication is sorely needed.59

Another expansion can also be noted in a newer designation being used for the term oral history. Its replacement is "audible documents" in the Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States. In its revision of that work, the National Historical Publications Records Commission has created the designation "Audible documents of research of archival value." Oral history materials are thereby offered the status they deserve as important corollaries to historical documents. The automated system used for this Guide will permit periodic re-
vision and updating as well as computer-generated printing. For each center listed, this source will include its geographic location, hours and days open, fees, restrictions, copying facilities, subjects in the memoirs, volumes of holding, repository guide, and other such valuable information. Along with the Shumway and Meckler-McMullin publications, this *Guide to Archives and Manuscripts in the United States* will provide another landmark contribution to the effort of granting greater access to and bibliographic control of oral history materials.

The following year, 1976, the Microfilming Corporation of America published *A Bibliographic Listing of the Memoirs in the Micropublished Collections: An Oral History Guide*. This collection is drawn from the projects of nine oral history centers, foremost among them Columbia University’s collection. All the memoirs are open, and the copyright belongs to the respective oral history projects. A wide variety of topics are listed in the MCA’s publication. This offering has signaled the first computerized multiple access index to oral history memoirs. Consequently, the benefits of this project by MCA are twofold. The *Bibliographic Listing* marks an increased accessibility to oral history materials. Secondly, it indicates the ease with which such materials can now be obtained, accessioned, and retrieved through such indexing. And for the respective projects, royalties received will help to self-perpetuate and enlarge the projects as well as offer valuable resources which could advance the possibilities of international research.

Part II of Micro editions provides a topical and biographical index where two hundred oral history transcriptions are cited as having been converted into microfilm and microfiche. In the previous year of 1975, plans were also laid and have since been implemented for selected microforms dealing with oral history to be made available in a special educational format for use through high school libraries. The materials include transcripts, tapes, and study guides.

At its thirtieth anniversary celebration in 1978, oral history assumed a new and exciting dimension. *The Dictionary*
of American Biography had commissioned the Columbia oral history research center to interview extensively all persons likely to be included in that important reference work. Since, in one sense this will be an obituary-type gathering of facts and highly personal or confidential information, interviewers must seek for and probe into areas not presently available in any other sources. Oral authors will be encouraged to be frank in their sharing so that the material eventually included in the Dictionary of American Biography will be as complete as possible.

Columbia considers this its most ambitious project to date. Three-year gifts and matching funds from the Rockefeller Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities will make $400,000 available for this purpose. As the Columbia proposal for these grants stated:

The object is not only to enhance the DAB. It is primarily to obtain intimate firsthand narratives that would not otherwise exist for future scholars in many fields. DAB's bibliographic notes will alert them to the existence of these sources. The fact that an increasing majority of DAB subjects leave no papers of consequence makes such material the more vital to American scholarship, and to the ultimate enrichment of our heritage.42

The problems of indexing oral history collections cannot be ignored. At the fourth national colloquium, Nathan Rein- gold described a technique that, with modification, could become a feasible method of providing subject and oral author information for a wide range of users. In his own words:

Essentially, you feed the entire body of the document into the computer by paper tape or magnetic tape, and punched in, typed in... The machine has an indexing program which instructs it to index all the terms that are, let us say, nouns or something like that. You can set it up, there are some exclusion terms that you
put in, and you will get an enormous index, very detailed and it does not have a SEE ALSO structure, which you may or may not want, but it turns out to be an extremely useful thing.348

Without doubt, this technique would have its negative as well as its positive aspects. Instant indexing according to a pre-determined program is its greatest asset. Accuracy of indexing is another. But, on the other hand, we confront the problems of such a tightly devised indexing code that the expanded possibilities in the text are ignored. At the same time, the cross referencing so necessary to the scholar is not available through this approach. Naturally, the ratio of cost to use is also important and may be feasible only for very large programs of oral history.

The March 1966 issue of Wilson Library Bulletin considers in detail several very important problems of access that eventually need solution not only on a local but also on the international levels into which oral history is moving. One of them is the series of problems related to interlibrary loan. The increasing dissemination of subject or oral author type bibliographies will create demands for materials needed by historians, biographers, and genealogists, to name a few. However, the original tape is a unique copy, and the preservation of its uniqueness must be acknowledged by its user. Even if the material is available, other difficulties must also be overcome. The use of some parts of the oral or transcribed interview might be restricted to the very user who needs that specific information. Expense is another major issue. The material is bulky if mailed, or expensive for those who must travel to the site if the materials are not available in any other way. To Xerox or microfilm materials is also costly. The original institution may not have the staff nor the time to make such duplications for the patron. The new copyright laws may also make such duplication illegal under certain conditions.

One program has managed to establish policies on this issue of lending and duplicating materials. The oral history office at
Berkeley will make photocopies of open transcripts available to depositories with holdings in that subject field. Thus the photocopies become a permanent collection of that subject area in the new depository. Berkeley’s policy of photocopying its materials is more common in other centers, also, than is the lending of specific memoirs.

A final problem of access to materials as presented by Wilson may be related to the typescript that is not sensitively indexed for the needs of the scholar or other patron. Consequently, even if the material is available, it may remain buried within the tape or typescript for the researcher to discover only by patience and the expenditure of a great deal of time. Indexing which provides false leads through irrelevant inclusions or which has omitted valuable terms that would have unlocked important topics for the researcher to pursue is a serious problem in making materials accessible to the full range of patrons.

Access to a collection relates also to the need for transcription of such material. To justify the time and funds needed for transcribing tapes into a printed form, several factors must be considered. The materials, as correlative historical documents, are primarily for the use of scholars and secondarily for the use of patrons in a certain locale. Consequently, the time element is important. Oral history is discursive by nature; many blind alleys may appear within the tape itself. For the researcher to listen to all the tape in order to extract the material needed for his work could pose a serious problem: loss of valuable time. True, a carefully indexed tape could make desired materials more accessible. However, possible incompleteness of taped statements within certain segments of the interview must be weighed against the more fully developed treatment more readily perceived through scanning the printed transcript. This method, correlated with access to an indexed tape, would be of invaluable assistance to the scholar.

In addition, most scholars use topical approaches to their research. They may find that the indexer of the tape has
not used the same point of view that the researcher might have when working with the tape. The scanning of a transcript would more easily determine that. In addition, even though a table of contents and index for each tape would be helpful, listening itself is a difficult art. It is also much slower-paced than reading ordinarily is. When the scholar does find the material on the tape, he is then confronted with a transcriber’s task: What punctuation should he use? What deletions are necessary to sharpen the focus of the comments without changing the thrust of the topic? These and other such problems should beset the transcriber, not the researcher. Consequently, budgeting for transcription of tapes will encourage their use because of the relative ease of access to specific information within the transcribed interview. As for the problem of retaining or erasing the interview tape, we cannot ignore the fact that the institution’s decision in this matter will influence the dissemination of materials and the access to them by interested parties. For those intent on erasing tapes, little consideration is given to the linguists, historians of the spoken word, and purists of the oral history approach who would be unable to consult the actual moments of interview without the intermediary work of the transcriber. For those intent on retaining the entire tape, the question of legal rights to the material cannot be ignored, as the question of duplicating tapes upon request is considered and resolved.

The Oral History Association’s national colloquium in 1978 stressed the fact that the problems of access must be recognized even while one is planning the principal questions for the interview. In addition, careful notetaking and later clarification of references or the meanings of key words used during the interview are vital for both the transcriber and the indexer. Cullom Davis devotes a sizable portion of his book, From Tape to Type, to this necessity of keeping future users in mind during the indexing process. He suggests using one person to do all the indexing so that a consistent editorial viewpoint is maintained. This can be achieved if the indexer reads the entire transcript first for perspective, and later lists all significant
proper nouns. Davis cautions that no indexer should be a slave to predetermined subject headings nor to a rigid point of view. He does, however, see the necessity for an authority file, allowing internal tracing systems, which would give some control to the compilation of the subject headings for the entire collection. In addition, a workable system of cross referencing should also be developed.

Materials must be accessible not only when they are in the finished form, but also while they are in the process of being transcribed. The University of South Dakota’s oral history office uses a progress report book in which each tape can be traced completely throughout its various phases of completion. This locator file permits the librarian to know exactly where the tape is, in what stage of completion it is, who is working with it, and whether or not any kind of restriction has been placed on the material by the oral author. Thus, a patron’s request can be honored at any time. The extensive processes from interview through transcription justify themselves when those needing the documents can readily locate and use them. Such is the concern of all centers; such has always been the direction that the Columbia oral history center has taken since Nevins began the collection in 1948. Perhaps an intensive examination of access to the Columbia material may serve to summarize the work of other centers as well as re-emphasize the success and struggles related to access and control of oral history materials.

"Columbia adds about fifteen thousand pages of newly transcribed materials to its files each year." This staggering statistic suggests also the enormous problem of access that confronts this largest oral history program in the United States at the present time. Up to the present, approximately 2,700 persons have been interviewed through this program. The 460-page publication, *The Oral History Collection of Columbia University*, has become the bible for researchers desirous of using the wealth of information in those materials. This guide allows initial access to almost 360,000 pages of transcripts. Columbia
groups its collection under nineteen subject headings ranging from "Agriculture" to "Urban Development." It also provides biographical entries for the oral authors as well as proper noun references within the respective interviews.

Study of these transcripts materials can be easily arranged through the oral history center at Columbia. The researcher with scholarly intent is given access to the manuscript room where such transcripts are housed and may be used one at a time. When using the oral history collection at Columbia, one finds that all entries are in a single alphabet followed by content description; then the pages in the transcript—exclusive of index—are cited. Availability, year of final interview, and inclusions in the New York Times Project or in microfiche are noted. An important cross reference section helps to integrate the collection for the user.

Each transcript has noted within its introduction the purpose for which the project was undertaken and the reasons for choices of the oral narrators. Where necessary, rationale behind the choice of transcription format is also provided. For example, the first transcriptions under Allan Nevins's direction were continuous narratives with the interviewer's questions being deleted; the content and direction of the narrator's remarks implied the question posed for such discourse. Nevins chose to do this to conserve space and to facilitate reading for the researcher. He also determined to do a minimum of editing and then only to eliminate repetition, to clarify, or to correct the grammatical errors so easily made in speech. By this minimal editing, Nevins hoped to make this typed record 99 percent true to the spoken word. However, earlier narrators expressed concern that the transcriber seemed to put words into their mouths. At present, therefore, Columbia includes the full interview format, indicating both the oral author and the interviewer.

Perusal of the Dorothy Canfield Fisher transcript within the Book of the Month Club Project bears out the difficulty of access to material if a transcript were to be indexed but not
edited. The interviewer allowed her to make many digressions which eventually did return to the main point so that by the end of the interview a composite picture had easily been woven. However, the editing of the transcript does help the researcher to determine more easily the overall pattern of the interview, as well as the paragraphing and punctuation so vital to one's using quoted material from this interview. In addition, the interview with Allan Nevins himself devotes only seven of its two hundred ninety transcript pages to the conception and formation of the oral history movement. Of further interest is the fact that access to these seven pages comes only through one's scanning all the material, since Columbia does not use subject heading entries. To provide relative ease in access to these materials, however, Columbia does provide a chronology of the life of Nevins, the oral author, as well as of other narrators wherever such information serves to aid the researcher in interpreting the interview itself.

Three other kinds of access to each transcript provide limited but useful information. The Table of Contents is generally sketchy, perhaps because Columbia does not use a subject heading approach for access to its transcripts. Limited also is the index, which includes proper names only. After each name is the listing of pages in which that person is mentioned. The number of such citations gives some indication of the importance of the individual, even more perhaps than does the inclusion of the name itself in the index. Also, if additional materials—pictures, artifacts, etc.—were deposited with the interviewer, such notation is made also. For example, the Carnegie Project's listing of donors fills three pages.

Columbia's Annual Report for 1975 states that 70 percent of all oral history projects in the United States transcribe their interviews. Since Columbia has the largest collection in the world by reason of its size, funding, and the value of its memoirs, the methods of access it provides for its visitors and correspondents greatly enhance the value of this vast collection. Columbia also makes accessible to the visiting scholar numerous
materials related to other collections in the United States. Many
project centers send their copies of manuals, bibliographies,
and other materials to Columbia. These are readily available,
as are out-of-print materials as well.

Access to oral history material has not been solved by
Columbia, however. At the first national colloquium, Louis
Shores indicated that the
collection of sources at Columbia was represented
by a catalog which presents only these four access
possibilities: a biographical directory of the inter-
viewees, alphabetically arranged; a list of the special
projects; a record of the lectures, seminars, forums,
and panels; and a list of the persons represented.

He emphasized, however, that "research requires more
detailed indexing than that, and analyses beyond any thus far
bibliographically recorded for these source materials.\(^5\)\(^0\) Shores
envisioned the value of KWIC-key word in context—which would
allow indexing into a machine-readable catalog. This would,
in turn, allow a computerized print-out record which could be
continuously accumulative.

The following year a colloquium speaker, Luther Evans,
continued to look to Columbia for ways to provide greater
means of access to its oral history materials.

We've got a project going at Columbia on this com-
puter work in connection with the control of library
collections, and cooperating with other libraries to see
how computers could be designed, computer programs
could be designed to help control the contents, biblio-
graphic control that is, of the contents of great re-
search libraries.\(^5\)\(^1\)

At this point we may join Luther Evans in wondering:
why did Columbia choose to index its vast collection by name
only? Elizabeth Mason, assistant director of the project, offered
several reasons. She believes that for their mammoth collection, a subject index would be unmanageable. In addition, the persons working in the project during the early years were not trained librarians nor indexing specialists. Such is still the case. Mrs. Mason does, however, see a type of indexing control built into the New York Times Project which has converted many of Columbia's oral history materials into microform. The New York Times Project has promised Columbia a topical index which will be cumulative. New material as it is submitted to the program will be folded into this topical index, which was created with the first contracted materials in the plan. Thus, Columbia will be able, through this technological approach, to provide researchers with even greater access to its vast and diverse holdings in oral history.

During that same interview, Mrs. Mason, a vital force in the Columbia research project and in the Oral History Association as well, declined the invitation to describe the present state of bibliographic control. She did this for several reasons. First of all, oral history projects have been created to meet various needs and to fulfill different purposes. To meet them, each project has had to grow in unique directions. In addition, advances in technology may still make bibliographic control difficult: common standards would have to be agreed upon by different project centers, a situation most unlikely at present. The Bowker publication has come the closest to showing some implications of commonality among the cited projects, but no revision of the 1975 work is presently foreseen. Perhaps in time the MCA computer system can mesh standards and individual directions to some point of acceptable uniformity. Until that time, the very idea of a subject index for the Columbia collection is unlikely. Mrs. Mason emphasized that the interviews are of too diverse a nature to allow any but an unmanageable subject heading attempt at indexing. Columbia has also shied away from a union listing since it delves into such a wide range of experiences when selecting its oral authors.

Lastly, bibliographic control difficulties are compounded by
the fact that oral history is not a discipline. In consequence, little common ground exists among many projects. Such freedom is wise. Each viewpoint of every project director is as unique as it is valid. Therefore, the very interdisciplinary nature of oral history may tend to complicate the matter of bibliographic control for quite some time.

(To be continued)