

Shorter Features

CHRISTOPHER BEAM, *Editor*

The Shorter Features department serves as a forum for sharply focused archival topics which may not require full-length articles. Members of the Society and others knowledgeable in areas of archival interest are encouraged to submit papers for consideration. Shorter Features should range from 500 to 1,000 words in length and contain no annotation. Papers should be sent to Christopher Beam, Shorter Features Editor, *American Archivist*, National Archives and Records Service (NCWA), Washington, DC 20408.

Videotaping History: The Winthrop College Archives' Experience

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Many archivists are familiar with the uses and techniques of oral history and engage in interviewing projects for the purpose of augmenting their collections and creating a supplemental record when written documentation is scarce. A recent development in the field of oral history is the practice of videotaping interviews. The interview itself, and the preparation for it, are conducted in much the same way as are audio taping sessions, except that the equipment is more expensive to purchase or lease and more complicated to use. Like audio tapes, videotapes come in reel-to-reel

and cassette formats, although the cassettes are the most widely used; like books, they are shelved vertically, and like other archival materials, including audio cassettes and microfilm, they require a stable environment with a controlled temperature (65 °F to 75 °F) and humidity (40 to 60 percent). The magnetic impulses on the tape will not deteriorate because of lack of use or the passage of time, but constant use can cause the magnetic impressions to flake off. To avoid damage by frequent use, a duplicate, referred to as the third-generation tape, can be made from the

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master, or second-generation, tape. The original, from which the master is made, is not played nor is it used for duplication. Duplicates are recorded on the three-quarter-inch wide tape of video cassettes, which will produce a clearer image than will narrower tape.

The advantages of the video medium over audio tape are its appeal to a generation raised on television, its ability to capture and project a visual image of the culture and mood of a period, and its potential use in community education. Community clubs, organizations, and schools may use the tapes for programs and classes, and local commercial television stations may be interested in airing edited tapes as a public service. This extension of the oral history technique may require more time, technical skill, and money, but its effectiveness in reaching a broader audience makes it well worth the extra effort.

The archives of Winthrop College of South Carolina had these advantages in mind when it undertook a videotaping project in spring 1980. The idea for the project originated almost spontaneously from informal conversations between the college archivist and two faculty members who had participated in a conference funded by the South Carolina Committee for the Humanities (SCCH). A poll taken at the end of the conference indicated that the audience wanted greater efforts made to preserve source material on women's history. The college archivist, through his efforts to collect women's history materials in South Carolina for the archives, and the faculty members, through their research in women's history, realized that very few documents for the study of women's history in South Carolina had survived, and they concluded that the public had little understanding or appreciation of the role of women in South Carolina's past. One apparent avenue of preserving women's contributions to the state's

development was through tape recorded interviews. They also realized that television was the best medium for reaching the general public and increasing their awareness of the vital role women play in the state's history. Since the South Carolina Educational Television System was mandated to work with colleges and universities, the local educational television station was called upon to provide technical assistance and to do the taping. The project had two objectives: to create a valuable and unique historical and educational resource and to increase public awareness of the role of women in the history of the state.

The first phase of the project was to organize a planning committee consisting of the college archivist, who served as the project director; two interviewers; and a technical advisor from the local educational television station. The committee worked for five months gathering data on South Carolina women and selecting participants. Women in the fields of education, politics, business, and civil rights were chosen on the basis of their involvement in local and state affairs. Efforts were made to represent a cross section of political viewpoints and backgrounds. Among those selected were Sara Vandiver Liverance, who was a major force in winning jury service rights for women in the state; Juanita Willmon Goggins, the first black woman elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives; Marguerite Tolbert, who was a leader in promoting adult education in the state; Lillie E. Herndon, chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Public Broadcasting Corporation and of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers Associations; and Alice Spearman Wright, civil rights activist instrumental in the development of the South Carolina Council for Human Relations.

At the end of the planning stage, a

budget was drafted, and a proposal was submitted to the South Carolina Committee for the Humanities. The costs included an honorium for the interviewee; salaries for a research assistant, clerical assistant, photographer, cinematographer, project director, and graphics designer; rental of a television studio; and the cost of supplies, telephone calls, and travel. SCCH granted \$9,500 for the project, with the remainder of the cost to be absorbed by the college and South Carolina ETV in matching funds. These matching funds included ETV staff time, studio rental, and salaries for the time spent on the project by the Winthrop College Archives staff and the faculty.

The project consisted of eleven thirty-minute interviews videotaped and produced in the studio of the local ETV station. With part of the SCCH grant, a research assistant was hired to aid interviewers in gathering background information on the narrators. The women's history collection at the Winthrop College Archives served as a primary source of information, although other archival repositories and sources were also consulted. Many of the still photographs displayed at the opening of the program had to be retrieved from the participants' school yearbooks and family albums. The production team used the photographs to put together a montage on the background of each woman to be interviewed. The project's logo, which was designed by the college's office of public affairs, was painted on the studio backdrop, and the studio was set up for the interview. The project director matched interviewers and interviewees according to common interest and experience. When sufficient data had been gathered on the interviewee and her activities, an outline of the questions was drawn up and presented to the project director for discussion.

An initial meeting with the interviewee was set up before the taping to gauge the attitudes and personality of the narrator. Because the taping sessions ran on tight studio schedules, there was no chance to retape any segment of an interview. Therefore, it became essential to make the interviewee feel comfortable as quickly as possible with both the subject of discussion and the setting.

The taping session began by acquainting the narrator with the ETV staff and the procedures of the studio. After the interview, the tape was played back for the participant. Later, when asked to evaluate the project, many of the interviewees commented favorably on the project, especially on the capacity of the series to impart a sense of personality to the study of history. Some also felt that the series called attention to yet unresolved problems confronting women in the state.

The editing of the videotapes marked the final phase of the project. Once the taping and editing were complete, copies of the videotapes were made and deposited with the Winthrop College Archives and Special Collections Department and with the SCCH office, to be made available for loan to the public. The project took a total of 260 hours of labor to complete. The tapes are now also a part of the SCCH Resource Center, which was established by the South Carolina Committee for the Humanities for the purpose of collecting and lending the products of SCCH-funded projects.

Publicity became the main concern of the project director in the final phase. Public notices, including the dates and times of specific programs, appeared in newspapers, television listings, and the state ETV guide. The series was aired twice a week for six weeks on Monday and Wednesday evenings, starting in October 1981. Special publicity was arranged in the home community of the in-

interviewee at the time of her appearance on the program. The director of the project also prepared a brochure with photographs and a short biographical sketch of each narrator as well as information on the availability and lending procedures for public and private institutions and organizations. The brochures were then mailed to potential users of the videotapes, such as colleges, universities, public libraries, historical societies, public schools, and women's clubs.

Although there is no accurate way to measure viewer response to the series, loan requests from viewers and comments from organizations receiving publicity releases, as well as direct feed-

back from viewers, indicated that the project was successful. The largest volume of requests came from women's organizations during the observance of National Women's History Week in Spring 1982.

The success of the series emphasizes the need for similar community-based projects. Through utilization of such projects, historical societies, archives, and other special collections repositories can not only publicize and augment their collections but also can make an important contribution to the community by increasing public awareness of the community's heritage and activities.

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