

Case Study

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“Play it Again, Sam”: Historical Slide Presentations in Public Programming—A Case Study

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Abstract: Attracting favorable attention to archival holdings and services is a fundamental concern of archivists as administrators. The slide presentation that depicts the history of the host institution using the resources of the archives can be an effective and economical promotional tool. Undertaking this kind of public programming requires an analysis of the potential audience, well-defined objectives, attention to technical decisions of format and length, product testing, and marketing. The Ohio State University Archives has developed a presentation that has drawn the attention of the entire institutional community— administrators, staff, faculty, students, staff, and alumni.

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The codfish lays ten thousand eggs.
 The lowly hen lays one.
 The codfish never cackles
 To tell you what she's done.
 And so we scorn the codfish
 While the humble hen we prize.
 Which only goes to show you
 That it pays to advertise.¹

IN RECENT YEARS, ARCHIVISTS have tried to appear more like hens than codfish. Drawing attention to the value of archival holdings and services has become an important topic of discussion among archivists. Although being noticed does not guarantee programmatic support, being overlooked invariably means being underfunded. In 1982 the Society of American Archivists published a manual to guide archivists in undertaking programs to develop favorable publicity.² Yet, in 1984 a survey of resource allocators concluded that archives suffered in the competition for financial support because of a lack of visibility within their host institutions.³ For this reason, one of the goals of the Society of American Archivists Committee on Goals and Priorities has been to "educate archivists concerning the kinds of outreach activities under way in the archival profession."⁴ The historical slide presentation prepared by the Ohio State Univer-

sity Archives can serve as an example of an effective outreach activity.

Histories illustrated by slides are just one of many opportunities that archivists have for reaching the public. Others include exhibits, brochures, public lectures, and videos. Nevertheless, the slide presentation has several advantages. Most archival holdings include photographs or other materials that can be made into slides; slide presentations can be produced inexpensively; they can readily accommodate new illustrations that fit a special audience; finally, slides and slide projectors are more portable than videos, films, and even traveling exhibits.⁵

Although most people are familiar with slides as teaching tools, archivists have said little about slide presentations in public programming.⁶ Much of the literature is published in the discipline of education, where the slide presentation is well known

⁵Lee Green, *Creative Slide/Tape Programs* (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1986), xi; Roger A. Kueter and Janeen Miller, "Slides," in *The Instructional Media Library*, vol. 13 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Educational Technology Publications, 1981), 6. Slide presentations can also be made into video productions at a modest price. In 1991 the cost of converting "OSU Family Album: Another Look" was only \$0.60 per slide and \$20.00 for synchronizing the audio tape to the video tape, for a total cost of \$72.00. Of course, special audio and visual enhancements will increase the cost of conversion to video.

⁶In addition to Pederson and Casterline's *Archives & Manuscripts: Public Programs*, notable exceptions are Arthur L. Smith, "Producing the Slide Show for Your Historical Society," *History News* 22 (June 1967): 125-132 and Richard Kesner, "Archives Reach Out: AV Programs at the Archives of Appalachia," *History News* 35 (March 1980): 42-43. Kesner described a slide program under development. Also useful is Timothy L. Ericson and Linda J. Ebben, compilers, *Audiovisuals for Archivists* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1985). This is a catalog of audiovisual materials of potential interests to archivists and refers to two historical slide presentations developed by the University of Wisconsin-Stout Archives and by the Winthrop College Archives. Ann E. Pederson, "Archival Outreach: SAA's 1976 Survey," *American Archivist* 41 (April 1978): 155-162 reported that slide presentations trailed exhibits, publications, and lectures as examples of outreach activity among archival agencies.

¹Anonymous, "It Pays to Advertise," in John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations: A Collection of Passages, Phrases, and Proverbs Traced to their Sources in Ancient and Modern Literature*, 15th edition (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1980), 923.

²Ann E. Pederson and Gail Farr Casterline, *Archives & Manuscripts: Public Programs* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1982), 34-38.

³Sidney J. Levy and Albert G. Robles, *The Image of Archivists: Resource Allocator's Perceptions* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1984), ii.

⁴Society of American Archivists, Committee on Goals and Priorities, *An Action Agenda for the Archival Profession: Institutionalizing the Planning Process* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1988), 67. Also important is Elsie T. Freeman, "Buying Quarter Inch Holes: Public Support Through Results," *The Midwestern Archivist* 10:2 (1985), 89-97.

as a teaching technique. These articles typically focus on production—making the slides, writing the script, compiling the slide collection.⁷ Presented here is a case study of a historical slide presentation as public programming by an archives in an educational institution, including analysis of the target audience, determination of objectives, considerations of design, costs of production, and concerns for evaluation and marketing. This historical slide presentation has brought much public attention to the Ohio State University Archives. Although each institution will have different circumstances, the experiences documented here can be replicated by other archival programs.

The Ohio State University Circumstances

The college or university is an environment steeped in history and in regular cycles of demographic change. Numerous buildings, streets, and landmarks bear the names of distinguished administrators, professors, graduates, trustees, or donors. The institution itself recognizes a self-interest in maintaining ties to its past and its graduates. Alumni are important for financial contributions and for recruitment of stu-

dents. Homecoming days and celebration of traditions and anniversaries keep the community's attention focused on the institution's ties to the past. Meanwhile, the campus population changes by roughly one-fourth each year. New students, faculty, and staff encounter the institution and the vestiges and heritage of its past.

As an institution, the college or university is also an organization of groups. Be they administrative, social, or professional in nature, each group holds meetings. These events provide opportunities for archivists to direct attention to their programs by providing what is common to all these audiences: a sense of their place in the historical context of the institution.

In 1989, two events moved the Ohio State University Archives to develop a historical slide presentation. First was an inquiry by an undergraduate counselor who asked for a historical presentation to orient new students to the university's past. At about the same time, the archives "discovered" a slide presentation, "OSU Family Album," that another department had presented as part of the centennial celebration of the university in 1970. Naively, the archives assumed that the existing presentation could be updated to accommodate the request of the counselor.

Designing the Presentation

The final product, "OSU Family Album: Another Look," bore only faint resemblance to the original show. In the process of evaluating the centennial production, ideas about what the new show should accomplish began to crystallize. One objective was to illustrate the history of the university in a way that the public would find both entertaining and informative. Another was to clearly identify the presentation as a production of the University Archives and as an invitation to use its collections and services. Finally, the organization of the show had to be sufficiently

⁷A search of the literature in the ERIC database between 1980 and 1990 revealed some 512 entries, while a similar search of *Library and Information Science Abstracts and America: History and Life* showed no more than a handful in each. There is some very useful literature. Especially helpful were Lee Green, *Creative Slide/Tape Programs* (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1986), Jerrold E. Kemp, *Planning and Producing Audiovisual Materials*, 3rd edition (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975), Jerrold E. Kemp and Deane K. Dayton, *Planning and Producing Instructional Material*, 5th edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1985) and Roger A. Kueter and Jaaneen Miller, "Slides," in *The Instructional Media Library* 13 (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Educational Technology Publications, 1981). Also see Ralph E. Wileman, *Exercises in Visual Thinking* (New York: Hastings House, 1980) and Juan R. Freudenthal, "The Slide As a Communication Tool," *School Media Quarterly* 2 (Winter 1974): 109–115.

flexible for the archives to adapt it to numerous audiences. Focusing on these objectives enabled the archives to make the slide show more than a collection of pictures. Instead, "OSU Family Album: Another Look" became an audiovisual product that served educational and promotional purposes.⁸

Some of the objectives proved easy to accomplish. Title and closing slides, designed with the assistance of the university's teaching support facility, identified the show as the creation of the archives (see Figures 1 and 2). The first slide depicted a photographic album opened slightly in order to illustrate the title, "OSU Family Album: Another Look." It also introduced the principal theme of the show: that the audience were members of one institutional family whose many generations had shaped the present. The closing slide provided the telephone number and address and invited the viewers to use the archives. A roughly chronological presentation of slides by decades offered the advantages of simplicity and flexibility of organization. The archives could easily insert additional slides to illustrate a special interest to a unique audience—for example, a photograph of the first trustees of the Byrd Polar Research Center for a presentation at the center—into the framework of decades.

Production of an informative and meaningful presentation requires that interesting photographs be accompanied by narrative themes for the illustrations to link the familiar places and concerns of the present to the heritage of the past. Many themes can be found in most institutions of higher education: the development of today's physical environment, as illustrated by well-known buildings and landmarks; the origins

of the curriculum, pointed out by photographic references to the first professors and graduating classes; and institutional concern for the participation of women and African-Americans, highlighted with photographs. Prominent donors and concerns for finances and successful fund-raising are also common threads shared by generations of the university community. Historical photographs depicting the teaching, research, and community service functions of the modern university appeared frequently in the program in order to link the past with the present.

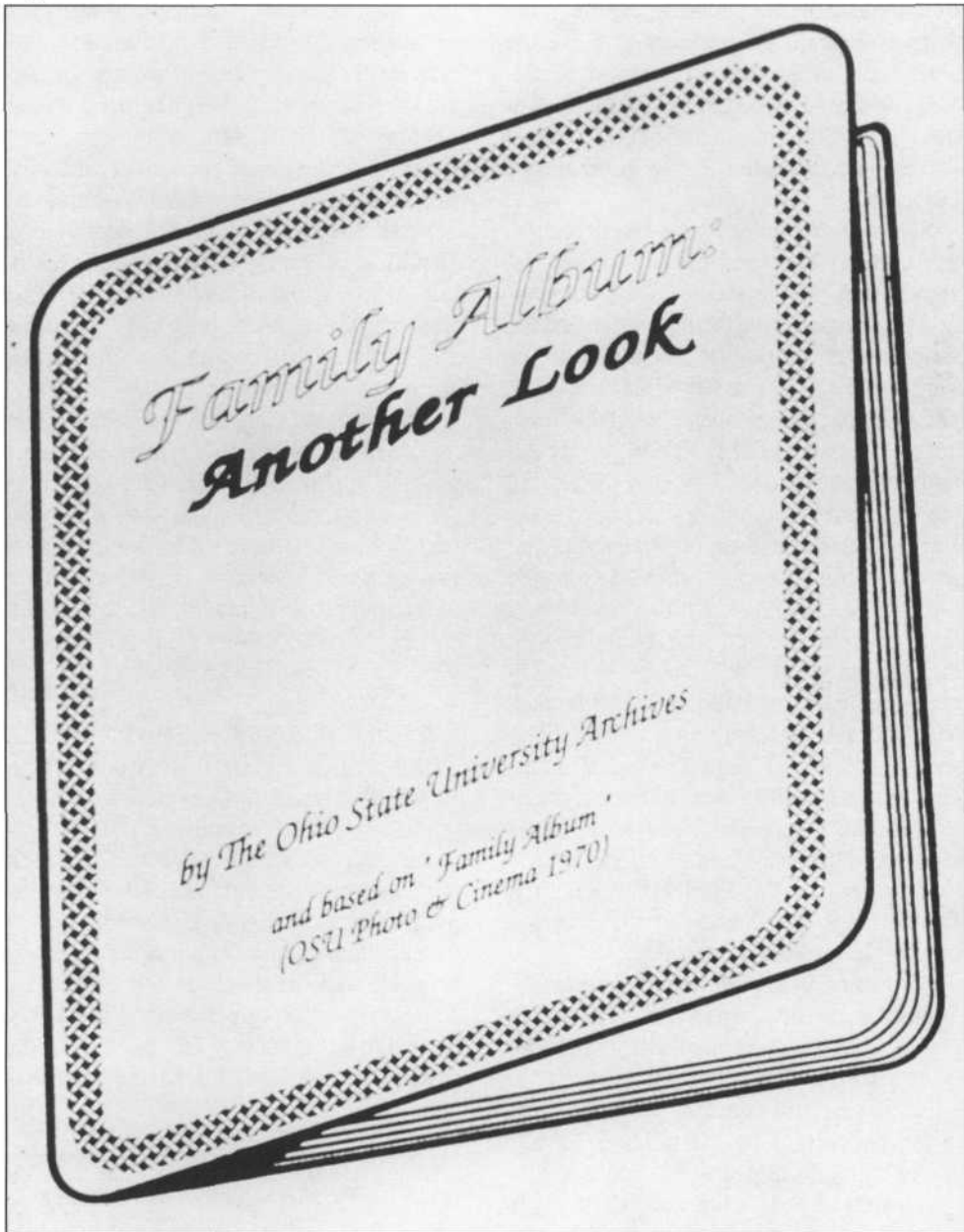
The program's length was a concern. For a slide show to fit into a typical meeting's agenda, it should not consume more than thirty minutes. Varying the pace of the presentation, with some slides having more narration and appearing on the screen for longer periods than others, also adds interest. In the end, "OSU Family Album: Another Look" contained a basic set of eighty slides.⁹

Technical considerations. Technical considerations are part of every production, from slide presentations to motion pictures. A simple slide show utilizes a single projector with a manually advanced carousel; more complex presentations require multiple projectors and slide carousels that advance automatically from a signal received from an audio cassette. In the Ohio State situation, simplicity was best. If the show proved to be so popular that the staff of the archives could not give all the presenta-

⁸For more information on this point, see Arthur L. Smith, "Producing the Slide Show for your Historical Society," *History News* 22 (June 1967): 125; Ralph E. Wileman, *Exercises in Visual Thinking* (New York: Hastings House, 1980), 18.

⁹Timing is a matter of some debate. Arthur L. Smith, "Producing the Slide Show for your Historical Society," 127, recommends a maximum of five to ten seconds per slide but a presentation no longer than fifty minutes in length. Lee Green, *Creative Slide Tape Programs*, 11, states that slide programs should be kept under twenty minutes, with much variation in the time a single slide is shown. Of course, the nature of the audience and the kind of illustration need to be considered. It may be that historical slide presentations warrant a presentation of more than twenty minutes, with lengthier viewing of each slide because the historical images are usually of extraordinary interest.

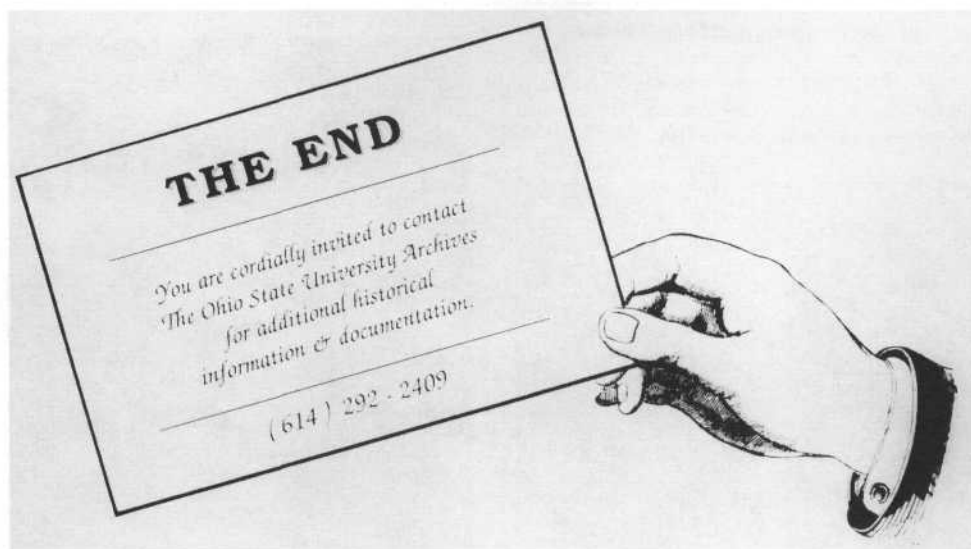
Figure 1



tions, then the archives did not want to lend expensive equipment along with the slide carousel. If the show depended on the availability of sophisticated slide projectors, many of the groups would not have the necessary equipment. In the end, the

archives created an audio-cassette tape that accompanies a carousel and a printed script. When the show is loaned, the presenter can either listen for a bell sound on the cassette to advance the slides or actually read from a copy of the script.

Figure 2



Budget. Financial considerations also influenced the technical decisions. Money for audio and video enhancements might be raised after a basic production had attracted attention. What mattered first was to develop an inexpensive prototype within the existing budget of the archives. The production of slides from eighty prints cost \$200. A graphic artist charged \$70 to design attractive slides for the title and the closing. The total cash investment for supplies and equipment used in the original show amounted to less than \$300. Three circulating copies, which could be loaned to groups too small or distant for the archives to commit staffing, cost roughly \$50 each. The modest initial costs of production will be “amortized” over years of showings. Each fall, as the university annually adds new members to the community as others graduate or retire, the University Archives will advertise the show as an event available to all.

Testing and revising. The value of the show had to be measured by the audience’s reactions. To this end, the archives invited select groups to view the show before marketing “OSU Family Album: Another

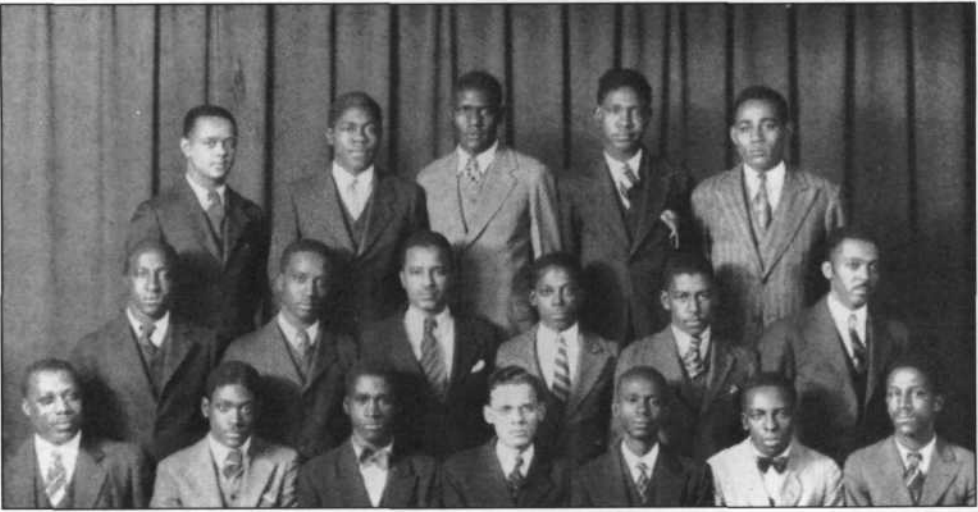
Look” to the entire campus community. Particularly useful were diverse small groups, such as “brown bag lunches” of the Libraries staff and the students and staff of the Office of Visitor and Community Relations. The latter has responsibility for tours of the campus. Other testing sites included the staff meeting of freshmen counselors and the staff of the archives itself. Survey forms documented reactions and guided the archives in balancing the number and pace of illustrations.¹⁰

This test marketing proved that the show was informative and entertaining. Responses from the first audiences also helped to identify areas where revisions or additions were needed. One noteworthy change was to make the presentation entirely black and white. Viewers complained that the combination of black-and-white and color slides distracted their attention from the story being told. The archives concluded that not enough color materials existed to portray the early years. Black-and-white illustra-

¹⁰An example of a survey form is in Green, *Creative Slide/Tape Programs*, 129–130.

(Clockwise) University Hall (the first building on campus, which served as a classroom building, administration building, library, and dormitory); the first graduating class (1878); Omega Psi Phi African-American fraternity (1930); architectural drawing class (1902); and the women's basketball team (1919).





*Top Row—MCLEOD, ROWLAND, PIERCE, BUREN, MANN.
Second Row—HUCKLEBY, RIDDICK, ORMES, WATLINGTON, HARTGROVE, BLOUNT.
Bottom Row—BLACKWOOD, LEWIS, PACE, HARRIS, PIETERS, LEE, JOHNSON.*



tions were sufficient in number to illustrate the themes of both past and present.

Use of the Slide Show

By the fall of 1989, "OSU Family Album: Another Look" was ready for mass consumption and marketing. The archives created and mailed a circular to all university departments and placed a notice in a campus newspaper, assuming that those who responded to the advertisements would, in turn, tell others.

Requests for presentations came from numerous sources, young and old. Freshmen viewed it as part of their autumn orientation to the campus; so, too, did a monthly meeting of the retirees' association of the university. In 1990, the first full year of viewing, "OSU Family Album: Another Look" had thirty-eight showings. Personnel Services used it as part of its staff orientation; particularly noteworthy engagements have included the president's cabinet meeting, the provost's staff meeting, and the monthly meeting of the university senate, which represents the 4,000 faculty of the university. Student organizations have invited the archivist to present the show and solicit the donation of organizational records to the archives. Periodically, professors traveling to distant locations have borrowed a copy as a way of showing the university to their hosts. The Cooperative Extension Service, which has agricultural agents in each of Ohio's counties, purchased a circulating copy for its agents as a resource for public relations.

The alumni association was particularly enthusiastic. As the largest single-campus university in the United States, Ohio State University has awarded more than 400,000 degrees in nearly 125 years. Alumni associations span the country and meet regularly. Members of the clubs not only celebrate the university but undertake projects to raise money and to recruit promising

students from local high schools. So important is this work that prominent representatives of the university, including the president, deans, vice presidents and athletic coaches, travel to club meetings and make presentations.

The Ohio State Alumni Association purchased a copy of the slide program of the archives and made it part of its public programming for its numerous clubs. The *OSU Alumni Magazine* advertised the show so that clubs in distant places can order copies. In addition, the association has placed the archivist on its list of sponsored speakers. In the last year alone, the archivist has traveled to clubs in Ohio, Florida, and Tennessee with the likelihood of additional travel in the future.

Each presentation, local or national, includes a brief explanation of the mission and services of the archives. Brochures describing the holdings, location, and hours of service are distributed. Because hosts vary greatly in their ability to introduce the presentation, the archives provides a script that establishes the proper context of the archival program's mission and services and the archival profession.

Effect on the University Archives

How has the archives benefitted from developing and marketing "OSU Family Album: Another Look"? After more than a year of public programming, there has been no dramatic impact upon traditional measures of archival performance. Use of the archives as measured in the number of patron visits and reference questions answered increased by less than 10 percent. Accessions of new material—records from offices, faculty papers, and student organizations—also grew, but not dramatically. Budgetary support for archival programs remained the same.

Traditional measures aside, the slide presentation has provided significant, if not

always tangible, benefits to the archival program. One indicator of the value of public programming is the size of the audience reached. "OSU Family Album: Another Look" has undoubtedly made many more people aware of the history of the university—and of the archives. An average of thirty people attended the presentations; the thirty-eight presentations in 1990 exposed more than a thousand people to the archives. From the letters and compliments that followed, the show clearly held the attention of many. They represent a new constituency, besides users and donors, that, at the very least, has a favorable impression of the archives. Some of them may, in turn, become active users or donors. It is still too early to observe the full realization of such results.

Another intangible benefit is that the presentations themselves exemplify the university's basic missions of research, teaching, and public service. Reports showing the number of presentations and naming the groups who viewed the slide program serve to document the contributions of the archives to the educational objectives, as well as the administration, of the institution.

Finally, the slide presentation and its showings involve the archives directly in the promotion of the university. In fact, the archives encourages departments to consider its historical slide presentation as a basis for presentations that focus more closely on a particular department. Departments could use these for orientation, promotion, recruitment, and solicitation. After all, good relations with the public—especially alumni, legislature, and prominent donors—are fundamental to the well-being of any institution and its departments. Time will tell whether the historical slide program of the archives will spawn versions for a single college, school, or department. Nevertheless, in an era characterized by shrinking public funds and massive cam-

paigns for private support, all efforts at public programming place the archives in the mainstream of the institution's contemporary concerns.¹¹

Archives have been compared to the fairy tale of Cinderella, in which the benevolent fairy godmother appears only at rare and special occasions, at times of centennial anniversaries and the like.¹² At those moments, the history of the institution, its distinguished faculty and alumni, and its outstanding contributions to knowledge are celebrated. When the party ends and midnight strikes, darkness again envelopes the archival program. The elegant furnishings of the gala revert to the battered hand-me-downs discarded by other departments. Thus, archives born of centennial celebrations languish after centennial histories and festschrifts are retired to remote shelves and exhibits are packed. When the time for commemoration has ended, the archives is again forgotten.

Historical slide presentations are instruments of public programming that archivists can use to keep "midnight" from striking. The experience of the Ohio State University Archives shows that a diverse, significant population has a continuing interest in the history of their employing or credentialing institution. This universe includes persons who may have no interest in formal historical research, but who are surrounded or affected by an institutional environment that is the sum of many generations. Each year this population changes by at least one-fourth, as the institution replaces departing graduates and personnel with new students, faculty, and staff.

For the new, the returning, and even the

¹¹Barbara Floyd, "The Archivist as Public Administrator," *The Midwestern Archivist* 15:1 (1990): 22.

¹²Paul H. McCarthy, "Archives Under Library Administration: Points of Convergence and Conflict," *Journal of Library Administration* 7 (Summer/Fall 1986): 18.

departed, the archives can provide an orientation to the present by depicting its historical context. The historical slide show can be an inexpensive and effective way to

achieve this goal. In the process, the archives receives numerous opportunities for visibility and credibility as a fundamentally important resource.