Oral History in the Archives: Its Documentary Role in the Twenty-first Century

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Abstract

While many archivists and librarians have celebrated oral history's documentary potential, others have questioned its reliance on faulty and subjective memory. The role of archivists as curator of collections or creator of records, an issue that has arisen anew in recent years, is central to this oral history debate. Drawing on fifty years of archival, library, and oral history scholarship, this article examines how the introduction of oral history in archives and libraries has challenged and informed archival theory and practice in the United States. The article argues that oral history's contribution and impact in the twenty-first century will depend on archivists' and librarians' ability and willingness to work together, in collaboration with other disciplines, to document and provide access to our oral heritage in the digital age.

For nearly a half-century, archivists and librarians have debated the theoretical and practical applications of oral history for archives and research libraries. Libraries first utilized oral sources to "fill in" the historical record in the early 1950s, and by the late 1960s, a handful of articles in the library and archival literature proclaimed its documentary value. In 1968, shortly after the founding of the Oral History Association (OHA), library science professor Martha Jane K. Zachert published her *College and Research Libraries* article "The Implications of Oral History for Librarians," to underline the new responsibilities and opportunities facing librarians.[1] Although it was not an in-depth or "landmark" study, Zachert's article was one of the first attempts to outline the ways in which oral history would impact libraries and archives in the coming decades. As such, it provides a useful framework for analyzing and evaluating archival, library, and oral history scholarship on the subject. Zachert's article also offers a basis for understanding how the role of

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[1] Martha Jane K. Zachert, "The Implications of Oral History for Librarians," *College and Research Libraries* 29 (March 1968): 101–3. Zachert's work is the *only* article to appear in *C&RL* that deals specifically with oral history.

oral history in archives and libraries was constructed in the past and how it can be viewed today.

Significantly, this investigation reveals that over the past ten years, oral history literature has continued to examine the archivist's role in oral history while archival and library scholarship has abandoned this crucial discussion for other topics. Oral history continues to be an important research methodology and tapes and transcripts need to be effectively integrated into academic library collections. Archivists and librarians must assume an active role in oral history discourse, collaborate with each other and colleagues in other fields, and be attuned to current scholarship needs if archives and special collections departments are to be viable, utilized research sources in the future.

Historical Background

To understand oral history's role in the archives and library, it is important to first place it in historical context. Significantly, the origins of oral history in the United States are rooted firmly in archives and libraries. The Columbia University Oral History Research Office, founded in 1948, was one of the first and most notable programs. Dedicated to documenting the "movers and shakers" in society, Columbia and other early programs found little support from skeptical history departments or from archivists who were critical of oral history's reliance on faulty memory.[2] Beginning in the mid-1950s, oral historians promoted oral history's value for library collections to library and archival audiences with some success.[3] Not until the social history movement in the late 1960s and 1970s did oral history become a widespread means to recover "history from the bottom up." Its earliest use, instead, was as an archival documentation strategy to supplement records of prominent historical figures.[4]

This archival emphasis—the practical use of oral history to supplement or explain information in existing archival collections—dominated the oral history field in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The OHA, founded in 1967, focused on the archival use of oral history to "build" collections rather than as a historical practice of "reflection upon those documents or speculation on how they might be used to develop new ways to view and do history."[5] Archivists and librarians

[2] Ronald J. Grele, "Directions for Oral History in the United States," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 2nd ed., ed. David K. Dunaway and Willa Baum (Walnut Creek, Calif.; London; New Delhi: Altamira Press, 1996), 64–65.

[3] For example, Vaughn Bornet wrote in 1955 that "a handful of the members of the historical and archival professions are convinced of the value of oral history. If the reminder—the doubters—are to be won over, the reminiscence-manufacturing industry must set and maintain high and uniform standards for its final product." Vaughn D. Bornet, "Oral History Can Be Worthwhile," *American Archivist* 18 (July 1955): 253.

[4] Grele, "Directions for Oral History in the United States," 65–66.

[5] Grele, "Directions for Oral History in the United States."

played a crucial role in the new organization by insisting that oral history interviews were public documents that should be open and accessible to all. Archivists such as Lila Goff, James Fogerty, James Mink, and William Moss were instrumental in providing leadership in OHA and in the Society of American Archivists (SAA) and in "bridging the gap" between the two organizations.

In 1969, SAA established an oral history committee mandated to clarify "points of common interest in archives work and oral history such as oral history as manuscripts; accessibility of oral history tapes and manuscripts; loan of transcripts; oral history and libel; and the training of oral historians."[6] By 1973, archivists began to view oral history more favorably, as evidenced by an SAA membership survey which found that "73% of responding SAA members believed that oral history should be viewed as a regular archival activity (i.e. those who engaged in oral history should consider themselves professional archivists.)"[7] That same year, OHA identified over three hundred U.S. oral history centers or projects and by the end of the decade the number had reached over one thousand.[8]

From 1975 to 1985, a series of external events changed the focus of American oral history and the OHA. The publication of Paul Thompson's *The Voice of the Past* accentuated the "nature of the historical enterprise," by focusing on how the practice provided new ways of doing history and capturing history from the "bottom up." International activities and National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) funding inspired more historians to turn to oral history to uncover the forgotten or unacknowledged history of women, minorities, and "ordinary" life. As oral history began to take root within the history profession, OHA began to emphasize historical analysis of the ways in which the field provided new means to study memory and history.[9] Archivists who used oral history to supplement existing documentation were joined by historians who capitalized on oral sources to understand those members of society with little or no documentary record.

Archivists responded positively to the growing popularity of oral history. In 1978, SAA's oral history committee printed a revised and amended version of OHA's interview guidelines in the SAA newsletter. The new version addressed the role of the archivist, in addition to those of the interviewee, interviewer, and sponsoring institution. In 1981, the SAA oral history committee became a professional affinity group, and in 1983 it organized as a section devoted to the

[6] Records, 1936–[ongoing], Society of American Archivists, UWM Manuscript Collection 172, Golda Meir Library, University Manuscript Collections, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

[7] Committee on Oral History of the Society of American Archivists, "Oral History and Archivists: Some Questions to Ask," *American Archivist* 36 (July 1973): 363.

[8] William W. Moss and Peter C. Maikana, *Archives, Oral History and Oral Tradition: A RAMP Study* (Paris: UNESCO, 1986), 16.

[9] Grele, "Directions for Oral History in the United States," 65–70.

study of "provenance, evaluation, appraisal, arrangement, access, legal agree-ments, and ethical guidelines as they pertain to the oral history interview as an original document."[10] Despite SAA's active response, many archivists remained skeptical of the value of oral history. A 1982 survey found that only 31 percent of 110 randomly selected college and university archivists were responsible for oral history.[11] SAA continued its involvement with the practice by sponsoring oral history workshops for its membership and in 1989 by collaborating with the American Historical Association (AHA) and OHA on AHA's "Statement on Interviewing for Historical Documentation."[12] No doubt the archival presence was responsible for the statement's stipulation that historians deposit their interviews with a library or archives.

Articles on oral history appeared in the library and archival literature in the 1960s, the 1970s, and in even greater numbers in the 1980s. Authors debated the value of the oral history interview, the appropriateness of creation of oral history interviews by archivists, as well as procedure and use issues. They also analyzed the implications of the new social history movement of the 1970s for archival documentation strategies, emphasizing the need for oral history to "fill in" scholarship gaps.[13]

Since the early 1990s, however, few archival and library publications in the United States have addressed the role and use of oral history in research insti-tutions. Instead, archivists and sound librarians have discussed oral history in terms of digital management, in the larger context of sound archives. With few exceptions, articles have reported on specific projects in the U.S. and in

[10] Records, 1936-[ongoing], Society of American Archivists, UWM Manuscript Collection 172, Golda Meir Library, University Manuscript Collections, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

[11] Nicholas C. Burckel and J. Frank Cook, "A Profile of College and University Archives in the United States," *American Archivist* 45 (Fall 1982): 420. These survey results provide an interesting contrast to SAA's 1973 membership survey in which 73 percent believed oral history should be considered a reg-ular archival activity. College and university archivists may have deemed oral history acceptable, but nine years later, most had not integrated oral history into their archival activities.

[12] "Statement on Interviewing for Historical Documentation," *Journal of American History* 77 (September 1990): 613–14. This statement is an appendum to the American Historical Association's "Statement on Standards of Professional Conduct." It was approved May 1989 by the AHA Council.

[13] For oral history articles in the 1960s, see for example three essays by Donald Swain "Problems for Practitioners of Oral History" (63–69); Saul Benison "Reflections on Oral History" (71–77); and Gould Colman "Oral History—An Appeal for More Systematic Procedures" (79–83) in *American Archivist* 28 (January 1965). For articles published in the 1970s, see for example Ronald Filippelli, "Oral History and the Archives," *American Archivist* 39 (October 1976): 479–83; and William Moss, "Oral History: An Appreciation" *American Archivist* 40 (October 1977): 429–39. For articles published in the 1980s, see for example David Lance, "Oral History Archives: Perceptions and Practices," *Oral History* 8, no. 2 (Autumn 1980): 59–63; James Fogerty, "Filling the Gap: Oral History in the Archives," *American Archivist* 46 (Spring 1983): 148–57; Thomas Carleton, "Videotaped Oral Histories: Problems and Prospects," *American Archivist* 47 (Summer 1984): 228–36; William W. Moss and Peter C. Maikana, *Archives, Oral History and Oral Tradition: A RAMP Study*; Graham Eeles and Jill Kinnear, "Archivists and Oral Historians: Friends, Strangers, or Enemies?," *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 9, no. 4 (October 1988): 188–89; and Dale Treleven, "Oral History and the Archival Community: Common Concerns about Documenting Twentieth-Century Life," *International Journal of Oral History* 10 (February 1989): 50–58.

other countries or at nonacademic institutions. On the other hand, oral history readers and anthologies have continued to address the role of archives in the field.[14]

The absence of archival publications on oral history since the early 1990s is curious as oral history was at the height of its popularity among historians during this period.[15] The SAA Oral History Section's slowly growing membership statistics underline its popularity and acceptance among archivists.[16] Another indication of broad acceptance is the findings of a 2001 University of Nevada survey that a third of the oral history programs responding had been founded after 1990.[17] Why then have archival and library publications not addressed more fully the role of oral history in archives and libraries in recent years? Furthermore, what are oral history's implications for twenty-first-century archives and libraries?

The following section uses the five points of Zachert's article as a framework to examine more than three decades of oral history discussion and practice both to illustrate how archivists and librarians have engaged the subject over time and to draw conclusions about oral history's role in and demands for archives and libraries today.

Create Rather than Simply Acquire Materials

Writing at the advent of the oral history movement, Zachert argued that oral history provides a unique opportunity for academic librarians to draw on their research expertise, public relations skills, and knowledge of collection

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[14] Oral history articles published in library and archival literature in the 1990s include: Bruce H. Bruemmer, "Access to Oral History: A National Agenda," *American Archivist* 54 (Fall 1991): 494–501; Charles T. Morrissey, "Beyond Oral Evidence: Speaking (Con)strictly About Oral History," *Archival Issues* 17, no. 2 (1992): 89–94; David Gerard, "The Word Made Flesh: Some Reflections on Oral History," *Library History* 9, nos. 3 & 4 (1992): 122–26. Jean-Pierre Wallot and Normand Fortier's article, "Archival Science and Oral Sources" in *Janus*, no. 2, 1996, was reprinted in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 1998), 365–78. An article that addresses the subjective and unreliable nature of memory is Walter Menninger, "Memory and History: What Can You Believe?" *Archival Issues* 21, no. 2 (1996): 97–106. Articles concerning oral history's archival role in specific countries include: Robert B. Perks, "Bringing New Life to Archives: Oral History, Sound Archives and Accessibility," *International Association of Sound Archives Journal* 12 (July 1999); and Lisa Klopfer, "Oral History and Archives in the New South Africa: Methodological Issues" *Archivaria* 52 (2001): 100–125.

[15] Grele, "Directions for Oral History in the United States," 74.

[16] In 1985, the Oral History Section membership totaled eighty-five people. In 1994, the Section's membership was 140 or 4 percent of SAA's total individual membership, and in 2001 it totaled 163 or 5 percent. Records, 1936–[ongoing], Society of American Archivists, UWM Manuscript Collection 172, Golda Meir Library, University Manuscript Collections, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

[17] Mary Larson, internal report at the University of Nevada Oral History Program. E-mail correspondence from Mary Larson to Ellen Swain, 18 September 2001 and 14 February 2002, in possession of the author.

gaps to make a "creative, intellectual contribution."[18] This argument is part of a larger debate over archivists' role as curator of materials or as creator of documentation that has taken on new meaning for postmodern theorists in recent years. Over the last decades, one of strongest deterrents to oral history's acceptance among archivists and special collection librarians has been the idea that they, as neutral, impartial curators of collections, can or should not "create" records. Of course, this neutrality or objectivity is a noble but unattainable goal. The origins of this aversion to "creating" records are grounded in traditional, twentieth-century archival theory.

Theorists proclaimed that the responsibility to safeguard and uphold the authenticity of "the record" was central to an archivist's duties. Theory dictated that archivists must maintain "documents as nearly as possible in the state in which [they] received them, without adding or taking away, physically or morally, anything."[19] In addition, they must not allow personal biases or interests to determine what materials they acquire for the archives. As William Moss explained in 1988, when archivists *conducted* oral history interviews, they participated in and to some extent determined the nature and content of the record produced.[20] Many archivists felt they jeopardized their preferred status of neutrality concerning record content.

In the context of these admonitions, archivists debated the appropriateness of their active participation in oral history, both as collector and creator. Ronald Filippelli, expressing "bewilderment over the intensity of [this] debate," asserted in 1976 that subject expertise is the key, not whether the interviewer is an archivist or historian.[21] In 1981, archivists at the Canadian Oral History Association took up the issue most forcefully. Derek Reimer urged his colleagues to "call yourselves 'historical researchers' or 'cultural conservators' but don't lose the opportunity of recording vanishing resources because of some arbitrary linear subdivision of the world of knowledge which says that archivists do not participate in the creation of records." Reimer insisted that archivists will be known in the future by their collections, not "by the purity of archival theory or the niceness with which we can distinguish between the true work of an archivist as opposed to a collector of oral documents." Archivists are the most knowledgeable about collection deficiencies and can best fill in gaps.[22]

[18] Zachert, "The Implications of Oral History for Librarians," 102.

[19] Hilary Jenkinson, "Reflections of an Archivist," in *Modern Archives Reader: Basic Readings on Archival Theory and Practice*, ed. Maygene F. Daniels and Timothy Walch (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Service, 1984), 20.

[20] William W. Moss, "Oral History," in *Managing Archives and Archival Institutions*, ed. James Gregory Bradsher (London: Mansell Publishing Limited, 1988), 149.

[21] Ronald L. Filippelli, "Oral History and the Archives," 480. For a negative view of oral history see Hugh Taylor, "Oral History and Archives: Keynote Speech to the 1976 Canadian Oral History Conference," *Canadian Oral History Association Journal* 1 (1975–76): 3.

[22] Derek Reimer, "Oral History and Archives: The Case in Favor," *Canadian Oral History Association Journal* 5 (1981–82): 30–33.

Arguing against archival participation, Jean Dryden responded to Reimer's address by insisting that active involvement in oral history is a dangerous departure from the traditional role of archivist. Archivists can identify "gaps" in their collection, but they do not have the expertise, the funding, or the time needed to conduct extensive research or anticipate questions of future researchers. Dryden believed that other archival activities such as reducing backlogs and establishing active acquisition programs are far more important than "creating records of marginal value."[23] Two years later, the role of the archivist in oral history was the focus of debate at an International Association of Sound Archives (IASA) conference. Participants emphasized the need for documenting gaps in the archives, promoting deposit of interviews therein, and employing trained historians in archival work.[24] More to the point, participant Ronald Grele suggested that the question was not whether archivists could or should conduct interviews. They already were doing so with promising results.[25]

By the mid- to late-1990s, new scholarship turned the archival impartiality argument on its ear. In a selection for *The Oral History Reader* (1998), Canadian archivists Jean-Pierre Wallot and Normand Fortier suggested that archivists are not neutral gatherers; they appraise records. Based on their biases and abilities, they choose which records and subject matter to collect and which to discard. In a sense, archival collections reflect their collectors. For Wallot and Fortier, involvement in oral history, then, was not a matter of "abdicating archival principles." Instead, it meant "influencing the creators of oral history and following procedures themselves if creating oral history."[26] This argument is tied to an early strand of scholarship that focused on collection development in light of social history scholarship interests.

The social history movement of the 1970s called archival neutrality into question by bringing to the forefront issues concerning collection development and appraisal and legitimizing the use of oral history. Historians in the movement turned their attention from studying prominent political leaders and organizations to focusing on understanding society through the experiences of groups underdocumented by "mainstream" repositories, such as women, minorities, civil rights and peace activists, and laborers. To do so, historians needed materials about these subjects that the archives did not contain.

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[23] Jean Dryden, "Oral History and Archives: The Case Against," *Canadian Oral History Association Journal* 5 (1981–82): 34–37.

[24] Richard Lochead, "Oral History: The Role of the Archivist"; Rolf Schuursma, "Oral History: The Role of the Archivist"; and Ronald Grele, "Oral History in Archives," *Phonographic Bulletin* 37 (July 1983): 3–15.

[25] Grele, "Oral History and Archives," 13.

[26] Jean-Pierre Wallot and Normand Fortier, "Archival Science and Oral Sources," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 375.

As early as 1975, SAA president Gerald Ham called for a more active and creative role for archivists in documenting history, as their "soundness of . . . judgment and keenness of . . . perceptions about scholarly inquiry" will determine the "scope, quality and direction of research in an open-ended future." One component in the making of an activist archivist was using oral history to "fill in" gaps and address the less-documented social aspect of history.[27]

In 1981, Frederic Miller addressed this issue by arguing that the new historical movement required archivists to "adapt" their practices to address current historical research needs. Miller argued that archival principles and practices were not immutable but were instead the "product of the understanding of the historical research at the time they were formulated." Since this understanding mirrors societal and technological changes, archivists needed to re-evaluate conventional archival wisdom by "discarding what has become outmoded, reordering priorities, and retaining what remains useful."[28] Dale Mayer pointed out that oral history could be an excellent means for documenting social history. In 1985, he emphasized that new research interests required archivists to "discover new ways of thinking about their most basic responsibilities."[29]

By the late 1990s, the social history movement created new implications for archivists. As Reimer and Wallot had suggested, archivists *were* judged by the collections they had or had not acquired. In 1999, Francis Blouin described a new line of scholarship that focused on "archives" as the *object* of study. Historians and others seeking to examine the underrepresented social aspects of history found little documentation of relevance in the archives. Blouin illustrated how these gaps in documentation affirmed certain historical realities and reflected archivists' biases as well as the constitutive role that status quo institutions played in defining both the historical record and history itself. He implored archivists to think more carefully about appraisal practices and their role as mediators of information. He argued, furthermore, that archivists needed to know how to respond to new questions being asked of the profession.[30]

Most recently, Mark Greene, Thomas Nesmith, and others have evaluated the role of archives, and indirectly the role of oral history and other memory-based documentation, within a postmodernist framework. At the heart of these

[27] F. Gerald Ham, "The Archival Edge," *American Archivist* 38 (January 1975): 13, 9.

[28] Fredric M. Miller, "Social History and Archival Practice," *American Archivist* 44 (Spring 1981): 119, 124.

[29] Dale C. Mayer, "The New Social History: Implications for Archivists," *American Archivist* 48 (Fall 1985): 399.

[30] Francis X. Blouin, Jr., "Archivists, Mediation, and Constructs of Social Memory," *Archival Issues* 24 (1999): 101–111. A year-long study (2000–2001) on "Archives, Documentation, and the Institutions of Social Memory" at the University of Michigan (UM) investigated the changing relationship between the role of archivist and historical pursuits. At the 2001 SAA Annual Meeting, Blouin and colleagues reported results of the conference in a session on the UM seminar.

discussions is the old debate concerning archivists' role as creator of materials or as objective curator of documents. Greene argues for the adoption of an "archives paradigm" which embraces Bruce Dearstyne's definition of records as "any type of recorded information, regardless of physical form or characteristics, created, received, or maintained by a person, institution or organization" and embraces the idea that all records—including those of transactional and institutional nature—are subject to archival mediation and subjective evaluation. Those who propose a "record-keeping paradigm" do not approve of memory-based documentation as oral history is not a transactional record of evidential value and does not satisfy legal requirements of evidence. Greene applauds Adrian Cunningham's assessment that the "elevation of the transactional record above all other sources of memory, evidence and storytelling impoverishes us all and makes us look plain silly in the eyes of the wider community." Oral history matters in piecing together history.[31]

Tom Nesmith also focuses on postmodern theory to understand the role of archivists in "mediating and thus shaping, the knowledge available in archives." Postmodernism shatters the notion that archivists are or can be objective caretakers of documents as their bias, interests, and backgrounds shape the ways in which they collect and maintain archival holdings. Nesmith asserts that archivists "help author records by the very act of determining what authoring them means and involves, or what the provenance of the records is."[32] Oral history is no longer the only type of documentation under scrutiny. Postmodernists have placed archival practice under the microscope and concluded that both the individuals who use the archives and those who provide access its holdings construct and author the meanings and "truths" of documents. Whether or not these arguments are valid, as Nesmith suggests, they offer a new lens through which to consider the archivist's role as collector or as creator.

Another component of the criticism of archivists' involvement in oral history is the argument that it adds to the mountain of paper documentation created by twentieth-century recordkeeping practices. In 1972, historian Barbara Tuchman took archivists and others to task for adding to the "explosion of modern paperwork" with questionable oral history documentation. For her and others, a large number of oral history projects provided unreliable documentation based on faulty memory and addressed insignificant subject material.[33] James Fogerty answered this criticism by pointing to the poor quality of existing documentation. Oral history, blended "with archival research," may be "crucial

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[31] Mark A. Greene, "The Power of Meaning: The Archival Mission in the Postmodern Age," *American Archivist* 65 (Spring/Summer 2002): 44, 48.

[32] Tom Nesmith, "Seeing Archives: Postmodernism and the Changing Intellectual Place of Archives," *American Archivist* 65 (Spring/Summer 2002): 24, 35.

[33] Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York: Twayne, 1995), 132.

to complete understanding of information in the papers and is the only way to add information that the papers do not contain." Fogerty and Tuchman agreed on the necessity of undertaking oral history with an "eye to making a genuine contribution to the historical record."[34]

Almost a decade after the publication of Fogerty's 1983 article, Bruce Bruemmer reiterated that the "nature of modern documentation demands oral history as a component of historical research" since it can fill in gaps and is a good hook to primary resources.[35] These sentiments were reaffirmed by Jean-Pierre Wallot who pointed out that researchers needed documents in all types of media to create a "total archives."[36] Donald Richie, in his 1995 oral history manual, characterized oral history as filling in gaps that paper documents do not address and providing "road maps" for researchers.[37]

It is clear that outside societal forces—historical research movements, social events, and technological advances—have required archivists and librarians to re-evaluate and, in some cases, change their perceptions of their roles and activities. The research demands of the social history movement of the 1970s brought to light the need for new resources that addressed underdocumented groups. Archivists, tentatively and slowly began to embrace or at least tolerate the idea that their role might involve active documentation strategies, such as oral history, to provide a more inclusive societal history.

These technological advances—the tape recorder, fax machine, e-mail, and the Internet—have pushed archivists and librarians to redefine their responsibilities in broader terms. In 1967, Arthur Schlesinger observed that in "three-quarters of a century, the rise of the typewriter has vastly increased the flow of paper, while the rise of the telephone has vastly reduced its importance." Helen Samuels amended this statement to include the impact of the copy machine, e-mail, and database systems on the ways in which we communicate.[38] When the twentieth-century proliferation of paper resulted in a loss of information, archivists, traditionally tied to paper-based documentation, used oral history to capture missing pieces in the correspondence. Oral history will have an important documentary role in the twenty-first century as more and more information, crucial to historical understanding, is disseminated over electronic media. For instance, college students at the turn of the twentieth century maintained

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[34] James E. Fogerty, "Filling the Gap: Oral History in the Archives," 149–50. James Fogerty comments on Tuchman's approval of oral history in e-mail correspondence to Ellen Swain, 25 February 2002, in possession of the author.

[35] Bruce Bruemmer, "Access to Oral History: A National Agenda," *American Archivist* 54 (Fall 1991): 496.

[36] Jean-Pierre Wallot, "Building a Living Memory for the History of Our Present: New Perspectives on Archival Appraisal," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 2 (1991): 265.

[37] Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 133.

[38] Helen Willa Samuels, *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (Lanham, Md. and London: SAA and Scarecrow Press, 1998): 9.

elaborate scrapbooks and diaries, and corresponded with friends and family on mailed stationery. Their counterparts in 2003 maintain elaborate Web pages, record their thoughts and activities on blogs (Web-logs), and correspond through e-mail. Oral history, as well as Web-based documentation strategies, will be critical for understanding student experience in the coming decades.

Furthermore, as electronic records stored in different outdated formats continue to be lost, archivists again must step into the active role of "creating" new documentation by migrating old formats to new, capturing Web pages to print or disk, and providing primary resources on the Internet. Nesmith emphasizes this point by arguing that archivists' mediating role will increase in the computer age as electronic records "are said to need transformation into a settled landscape or orderly records making and keeping and archival control."[39]

New Responsibilities/Skills

In 1968, Zachert insisted that oral history required librarians to develop new skills and expand their knowledge, particularly in regard to copyright and legal issues. Writing before the enactment of the Fair Use provisions in the 1976 Copyright Act, she implored librarians and archivists to become knowledgeable about copyright restrictions and liabilities. Willa Baum in her 1978 Louisiana State University Library School lecture, "The Expanding Role of the Librarian in Oral History," advised librarians to secure release forms for all oral history tapes and offered practical guidance on protecting interviewees' privacy through restriction agreements.[40] However, it was not until the 1985 publication of John Neuenschwander's work, *Oral History and the Law*, that archivists' and oral historians' awareness and understanding of legal issues was enriched. Urging his readers to secure release forms with all oral histories created by or deposited in the archives, Neuenschwander emphasized the importance of keeping abreast of legal developments. His biennial reports at OHA meetings continue to update the membership on outcomes of new cases, legal stipulations, and other developments concerning oral history litigation.[41]

With Internet and Web capabilities, archivists and librarians entered a new realm of legal problems and issues in the mid-1990s. Reflecting in a special *Oral History Review* issue on oral history at the millennium, Bret Eynon argued that the spread of digital technology is "forcing archives to rethink their roles, and function, and to confront difficult questions of security, protection and

[39] Nesmith, "Seeing Archives," 39.

[40] Willa K. Baum, "The Expanding Role of the Librarian in Oral History" in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 321–40, ed. Dunaway and Baum. Originally published in *Library Lectures* 6 (1978): 33–43.

[41] John Neuenschwander, *Oral History and the Law* (Carlisle, Pa: Oral History Association, 2002).

accessibility."[42] At OHA in 1998, archivists discussed the implications of placing oral history interviews on the Web. Discussion included the need to protect interviewee's privacy, the danger of misuse and manipulation of sound recordings and transcripts, and the "unmonitored access" of the Internet that would result in a loss of archival control over the interviews. Other questions concerned whether "deeds of gift that had not anticipated electronic reproduction and distribution would permit the posting of interviews on the Internet without the express permission of the interviewees or their next of kin."[43]

Karen Brewster's 2000 study of Internet access to oral histories illustrates how libraries with oral history collections dealt with them on the Web. Her analysis of sixty-four Web sites found that, overall, mainstream institutions had done "the hard and expensive work of researching copyright and going back to speakers from old interviews to seek permission for Internet access to their recordings." Much was lacking, however. While some sites had clear copyright protection statements, others did not mention the issue at all. In addition, interpretation of copyright regulations varied from institution to institution.[44]

Archivists and librarians, in recent years, have discussed oral history in the context of digitizing sound archives. Most encouraging are collaborative efforts that draw on expertise across disciplines to address rights management, preservation, and use of sound collections. The Council on Library and Information Resources' *Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis* report, the product of a symposium of archivists, librarians, preservationists, faculty, and folklorists who consulted on preservation and access to American folk heritage sound collections, indicated that rights in the digital realm are highly ambiguous and require collaborative guidelines and study.[45]

Although sound and digitization archivists and librarians are working admirably with other disciplines in addressing access, copyright, and preservation issues, collaboration is essential in all aspects of archival and library practice. Ronald Grele emphasized this point by arguing that oral historians needed the skills of both historian and archivist.[46] Archivists must step outside the archival box and engage oral historians by showing interest in their scholarship

[42] Bret Eynon, "Oral History and the New Century," *Oral History Review* 26 (Summer/Fall 1999): 24.

[43] Donald Ritchie, "Oral History and the New Century, *Oral History Review* 26 (Summer/Fall 1999): 13.

[44] Karen Brewster, "Internet Access to Oral Recordings: Finding the Issues," Oral History Program, Elmer E. Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska Fairbanks (25 October 2000), <http://www.uaf.edu/library/oralhistory/brewster1/> (1 March 2003).

[45] Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR), *Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis* (May 2001). The "Survey of Folk Heritage Collections," Appendix 2, found that 25 percent of organizations responding reported having release forms for the greater bulk (76 to 100 percent) of their collections. An alarming 39 percent of all individuals responding did not have release forms for their material.

[46] Grele, "Oral History and Archives," 15.

and interview tapes; providing leadership in access, legal, and preservation issues within OHA; promoting the importance of depositing oral histories in the archives; and making contacts to help develop archival holdings.

Integration into Library Collections

Zachert pointed out in 1968 that oral history introduced new media—namely audiotapes and reels—into paper-based collections. Two decades later, Graham Eeles and Jill Kinnear strongly argued that oral history belonged in libraries where it would be widely accessible and utilized in the context of other library resources. They stressed, however, that preservation of these recordings and transcripts had not received enough attention.[47] In 1991, Dale Treleven also asserted that archivists had not met the preservation challenge but instead were tied to "professional and organizational traditionalism at a time when products of new technology require change." Treleven argued that archivists, "secure in daily routines tied to paper documents, have been reluctant to explore the new technologies and master details about the special care required for the products generated by those technical processes."[48]

Treleven also pointed out that Frederick Stielow's *Management of Oral History Sound Archives* (1986), published nearly *forty years* after the advent of electromagnetic tape recordings, was the first major attempt in the U.S. to suggest a comprehensive archival strategy for oral history tapes and sound and visual recordings of other kinds. Sound archives, including speeches, music productions, and radio programs, and oral history interview recordings presented similar technical problems for the archivist. Trevelen suggested that archivists had been remiss in not acquainting themselves with the foreign sources and manuals available by the 1980s and that most had "lagged in shifting human and financial resources to processing, preserving, cataloging, and disseminating information about oral history tapes."[49]

Zachert could not foresee how the advent of virtual sound archives projects, such as the National Gallery of the Spoken Word (NGSW) at Michigan State University (MSU), would transform the issue of oral histories' and sound archives' integration into library collections. Funded by the National Science Foundation, MSU's revolutionary project has brought together digitized audio from several repositories' collections into a single searchable on-line database.

[47] Graham Eeles and Jill Kinnear, "Archivists and Oral Historians: Friends, Strangers, or Enemies?," 188–89.

[48] Dale Treleven, "Oral History and the Archival Community: Common Concerns about Documenting Twentieth-Century Life," 54–55.

[49] Treleven, "Oral History and the Archival Community." Bruce Bruemmer also discusses this lack of scholarship in "Access to Oral History," 495.

Clearly, as magnetic tape and paper documents are digitized, integration of different types of media becomes less of an issue for the "virtual" archives. Of course, not insignificant barriers to this process include funding and staffing. Despite this expense, the CLIR's *Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis Report* asserted that archivists' and preservation experts' reluctance to move forward with the technology, even as it changes, will result in the loss of analog media.[50] Although no one group had the solutions to preserving these media, the CLIR report emphasized that "it was clear that each sector that was represented, from archives to the law, holds part of the solution, and only collaboration will achieve lasting progress."[51]

As archivist Frank Burke pointed out in the 1976 reader *Archive-Library Relations*, archives and libraries hold much of the same materials and formats, including audiovisual materials. The difference in their operation lies in how these materials are cataloged or processed. Like archives, libraries faced difficulties in integrating these formats into their collections.[52] It is crucial for librarians and archivists to collaborate with one another to better understand how to care for audiovisual materials and explore opportunities for cooperative projects, the sharing of temperature-controlled audiovisual facilities, and the pooling of financial resources.

Bibliographic Control and Access

Zachert's fourth implication focused on the need to promote oral history collections through description in national resources such as the National Union Catalog for Manuscript Collections (NUCMC). Others, too, suggested interlibrary loan as a dissemination method.[53] By 1985, Clive Cochrane insisted that oral historians had concentrated too much on recording practices and not enough on access.[54] Six years later, Bruce Bruemmer argued that archivists "are at fault for the lack of access—uniform or otherwise—to oral history collections."

[50] CLIR, *Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis*, 9.

[51] CLIR, *Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis*, 16. Other collaborative conferences include the Best Practices for Digital Sound Meeting, held at the Library of Congress, 16 January 2001. A cross-disciplinary endeavor to discuss reformatting, metadata, data management, and intellectual property, the conference grew out of an ALA preconference on sound in the digital age that addressed the lack of accepted standards to use in voice-digitization projects. From that meeting, participants began to hold informal dinners meetings at ALA with other library colleagues with similar interest, including those from CLIR, Research Libraries Group, the National Agriculture Library, and a number of universities. In December 2000, some of these same people attended the Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis conference. Michael Seadle, "Sound Practice: A Report of the Best Practices for Digital Sound Meeting, 16 January 2001 at the Library of Congress," *RLG DigiNews* 5 (15 April 2001): 20–24.

[52] Frank G. Burke, "Similarities and Differences," in *Archive-Library Relations*, ed. Robert L. Clark Jr. (New York: Bowker, 1976), 31.

[53] See Filippelli, "Oral History and the Archives," 482.

[54] Clive Cochrane, "Public Libraries and the Changing Nature of Oral History," *Audiovisual Librarian* 11 (Autumn 1985), 205.

At the cutting edge of Internet development, he wrote that archivists needed to increase access to oral history through new databases, MARC records, and inter-library loan.[55] He also provided a national agenda for improved access to oral history. Goals for greater access, Bruemmer argued, could be attained only with a change in attitude toward access on the part of archivists and oral historians.[56]

Bruemmer's article, written in an effort to raise awareness of the need for enhanced access to oral history sources, led to SAA's successful application to the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) to fund a much-needed oral history cataloging manual. Marion Matters' SAA publication *Oral History Cataloging Manual* was published in 1995 and has become the "most widely used oral history cataloging tool developed to standardize library and archival cataloging of oral history transcripts and tapes."[57]

Since the publication of Bruemmer's article and the SAA's manual, library technological publications and conferences frequently have focused on access of sound collections through digitization and Web installation. Projects such as the NGSW, the Library of Congress' American Memory, and the University of Alaska-Fairbanks's Jukebox provide examples of how sound has been transferred to digital formats. A great advantage, Bret Enyon explained in 1999, was that transcripts and tape contents on the Web were not only available to remote users but could be accessed by keyword searches and supplemented with digitized written documents, photographs, and graphs. However, he pointed out that archivists who placed oral history interviews on the Web risked losing control of the use of collections.[58]

Preservation of analog and digital sound recordings also took center stage in discussion. The *Report on the Task Force on the Library Artifact* (2001) indicated that preservation of sound was difficult because of the fragility of recording media. Projecting access needs of future researchers is important, although archivists could determine these needs only by the present generation of users.[59] One of the key findings of a survey of collections undertaken by the American Folklore Society, the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the American Folklife Center in 2000 was that much of what has been recorded is poorly controlled,

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[55] Bruemmer, "Access to Oral History," 495. Bruemmer cited the University of Alaska-Fairbanks's "Project Jukebox," the first hypermedia application of sound recording, graphics, and pictures in the early 1990s, as an excellent access project example; SAA did address the need for oral history cataloging methods when it published Marion Matters' *Oral History Cataloging Manual* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1995).

[56] Bruemmer, "Access to Oral History," 497.

[57] Matters, *Oral History Cataloging Manual*, e-mail correspondence from James Fogerty to Ellen Swain, 25 February 2002, in possession of the author.

[58] Eynon, "Oral History and the New Century," 23–24.

[59] *The Evidence at Hand: Report of the Task Force on the Artifact in Library Collections* (Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources, November 2001), <www.clir.org/pubs/reports/pub103/contents.html> (1 March 2003).

badly labeled, and lacking critical documentation about rights to use. This was the case largely because in the past, professions such as anthropology, ethno-musicology, and folklore failed to secure releases from their informants.[60]

The University of Alaska-Fairbanks, a leader in oral history management and creation, presents a good example of archives-library collaboration. Since the establishment of its Project Jukebox program in the early 1990s, Alaska-Fairbanks has made substantial strides in enhancing access to its oral history collection through the inclusion of oral history catalog records in the university library database, the creation of MARC records for the collection, and providing oral history transcripts and tapes to distant users through the library's interlibrary loan program. Circulation statistics for the oral history collection increased significantly. The program is working to integrate more completely the archival and library collections through an on-line digital media database.[61]

The University of Alaska-Fairbanks's work to integrate archival and oral history material into a common library database stands as a model for how librarians and archivists can work together to provide greater access to oral history and to their other collections. Although archives and libraries hold many of the same types of records, they catalog or process them differently. While libraries create catalog records for individual books, archives create catalog records for individual collections, most of which contain numerous documents and formats. Many archival institutions do not create MARC records for their collection holdings but instead rely on "in-house" archives databases, which can be searched from the archives Web site but not the library catalog. Therefore, the possibility for collaboration and integrated special collection and library database systems is exciting and necessary. Not only will library-archives collaboration provide greater access to collections, the process will foster greater understanding between the two professions.

Further Study

Zachert's fifth and final implication of oral history for librarians centered on the need for additional study of bibliographic control problems. Zachert implored librarians in 1968 to embrace the opportunity to study information retrieval from new storage media, namely audiotapes and reels. As discussed earlier in regard to integration issues, librarians and archivists have dealt with sound materials haphazardly in the past. Importantly, the publication of

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[60] Of the 297 responses from organizations and individuals involved in folklore and ethnomusicology, 90 percent of all respondents do not have any of their collections available through the Web. CLIR, "Folk Heritage Collections in Crisis," Appendix 2.

[61] E-mail correspondence from Robyn Russell, Collection Manager, Oral History Program, Alaska and Polar Regions Department, Rasmuson Library, University of Alaska-Fairbanks, to Ellen Swain, 1 March 2002, in possession of the author.

Matters's oral history cataloging manual has enhanced access in recent years. Oral history cataloging records now appear in a standardized format in national and international databases such as OCLC and RLIN, as well as those of local and regional libraries and repositories. This format allows users to conduct more useful and productive searches of library and archives holdings.

Technological advances have revolutionized access capabilities in exciting ways, and sound librarians and archivists are collaborating with lawyers, computer technicians, and others to study preservation and access issues. National on-line databases for sound archives, integration of archival and oral history material with library catalogs, full-text searching capabilities for oral history transcripts, and complete audio of interviews on the Web are ensuring greater use of materials.

Of course, more study of and collaboration on these issues is necessary. As oral history recordings are provided to the public through digital sound databases, new issues arise. Archivists and librarians must find ways to ensure that oral history transcripts and audio are utilized by researchers in complete adherence to the wishes and legal restraints outlined by their creators. And, as with all audiovisual material, they must continually work to preserve these tapes in or transfer them to stable formats so that they remain available for future researchers. Certainly, collaboration with experts in audio and digital technology and with members of the legal profession is *the* vital component in this process.

In addition to the need for further study of bibliographic access issues, other important issues, not addressed by Zachert's article, require investigation. Archivists and librarians need to examine and consider cost and funding implications involved with oral history. Ronald Filippelli in 1976 argued that because of the high financial cost of oral history, archives should undertake a project with the expectation that it will become a major element of the program, with designated staff and support services. Anything "less will result in a slipshod program—the money might better be used for putting [one's] existing backlog in shape." Filippelli emphasized that archives should actively seek outside money to support such endeavors and that institutions should cooperate on projects to pool resources and provide experience.[62] In 1988, archivists at an SAA annual meeting session discussed the importance of conducting studies that compared costs of oral history and traditional records processing. Unfortunately, such studies have not received appropriate attention in subsequent years.[63]

Furthermore, archivists and librarians need to embrace opportunities to educate "would-be" oral historians—students, historians, and the public—

[62] Filippelli, "Oral History and the Archives," 483.

[63] William J. Maher's remarks as session chair, "What is the Bottom Line?: The Real Costs of Oral History," Society of American Archivists Annual Meeting, Atlanta, Georgia, 30 September 1988, in possession of William Maher. Dale Trevelen also calls for cost comparison in 1991 in "Oral History and the Archival Community," 53.

concerning proper interview techniques and equipment, the crucial importance of conducting background research on the subject of investigation, legal considerations, and the value of making oral histories available through deposit in libraries and archives. Archivists and librarians are in a position to influence and educate these interviewers to increase the likelihood that oral history will be done properly and will be shared, through libraries and archives, with future researchers.

Finally, the Web's impact on the role of oral history in archives is substantial and deserves careful attention. Robert Perks, curator of the Oral History British Library National Sound Archive in London, argues that oral history on the Web will be in the forefront of democratizing and popularizing archives for the next generations. As archives are available "not only remotely but interactively," they will be opened to users who "are not naturally inclined to visit archives and libraries, or who are more comfortable with oral and visual, rather than written, forms of memory and narrative." The twenty-first-century archives will provide access to its holdings through multimedia approaches involving "audio-visual recordings with maps, photographs, documents, transcripts and commentary."[64] Not only will these approaches require new relationships with sound archivists, computer specialists, law experts, and others, they also will pull the archives out of the basement and into the public light by creating more awareness of the archives' holdings and expanding its user base.

Conclusion

Three themes emerge from this review of scholarship. First, a general lack of scholarship by archivists and librarians in the last ten years concerning oral history's implications for information professionals reflects a move away from publication on documentation strategy toward greater emphasis on electronic access issues. Secondly, the need for archivists and librarians to collaborate with each other and with other professionals to discuss oral history issues and to build partnerships that enhance historical knowledge is paramount to the archival and library mission and collection development. Finally, archivists and librarians must become more attuned to historical research trends to serve an increasingly diversified clientele with changing needs. Oral history can play an important part in this process.

Providing information to meet the needs of researchers is central to the mission of the academic archives and library. Certainly, the early oral history programs in the U.S. introduced a means for providing a more complete historical picture for future users. And, it was by no mistake that these early pro-

[64] Robert B. Perks, "Bringing New Life to Archives," 24.

grams were connected with academic institutions mandated to preserve and make accessible these oral sources. Why aren't archivists and librarians, early leaders in the profession, more prominent and visible in oral history circles today? Why hasn't the role of oral history in the library been a topic of discussion in recent scholarship?

One possible answer is that archivists and librarians over the past decade have tended to align themselves with the technological sciences rather than the history profession. They are "information specialists" who have expertise in Web page development, digital access tools, and database design. While archivists in the past most often held doctoral degrees in history, they now have dual degrees in library and history, and their focus is on providing access tools and legal knowledge to their materials rather than in-depth subject expertise. Clearly, the oral history literature published over the last ten years and reviewed here reflects this trend in that it deals primarily with access to sound resources through digitization and Web development.

In addition, oral history practices and procedures are well established. OHA and SAA guidelines and policies outline the procedures of oral history interviewing and collecting, and SAA's cataloging manual is a recognized and widely used resource among librarians and archivists. Oral history isn't as "cutting edge" as it was in the 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps the lack of scholarship on the subject does not reflect a lack of interest, but rather a greater acceptance. Even if this assertion is correct, there are substantial reasons to insist that information professionals focus more attention on this area. The unlimited potential for collaboration among disciplines; library outreach to faculty, students, and the community; classroom education; and research through oral history practice demand active and innovative discourse.

Only a few archivists have chosen to write about oral history topics in the oral history literature, rather than in archival or library journals.[65] However, oral historians, reaching beyond the confines of their own disciplines, continue to highlight archival topics in anthologies, oral history readers, and some journals. The less interdisciplinary approach of archivists and librarians matches their stereotyped image as introverts who delight in caring for papers and books rather than mingling with people.[66] In contrast, oral historians come from many fields and interact easily with colleagues from many disciplines. As James Fogerty pointed out, oral historians are more outward looking and collaborative in

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[65] Oral history readers and anthologies that include sections on the role of the archives/library include: Dunaway and Baum, eds., *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*; and Perks and Thomson, eds., *The Oral History Reader*. A manual that includes information about the role of archives and libraries is Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*. Jean-Pierre Wallot and Normand Fortier, authors of chapter 30, "Archival science and oral sources" in *The Oral History Reader* are prominent Canadian archivists. It is important to note that Wallot and Fortier's article is reprinted from *Janus,* 1996.

[66] Sidney J. Levy and Albert J. Robels, *The Image of Archivists: Resource Allocators' Perceptions* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1985), iv.

nature than their colleagues in archival and library science.[67] As such, they are inclined to seek, embrace, and explore the viewpoints of other fields.

Collaboration with and understanding of other disciplines, although not always practiced or embraced, is essential to all aspects of library and archival practice. Lila Goff, James Fogerty, James Mink, and William Moss have bridged the archival and oral history professional gap and others from throughout the field must work to keep the bridge open in the years to come. One important way to "bridge the gap" is to invite oral historians to participate in archival and library conferences. Bruce Bruemmer called for a "proactive advocacy" in which archivists construct relationships between the oral history and library and archives fields not only by attending oral history conferences and meetings but also by inviting oral historians to participate in archival forums.[68] This holds true for other professions as well. Museum professionals, historians, anthropologists, computer technicians, public librarians, and others can provide invaluable insight into historical research and recordkeeping needs and practices.

Finally, archivists and librarians must be knowledgeable about research trends and needs of their users. As indicated in previous discussions, oral history is an important component in this collection development endeavor. Of course, collaboration is essential in this process as well. Archivists and librarians must be aware of collection gaps, become familiar with their user groups, keep tabs on what questions are being asked, develop relationships with faculty on campus, and enhance their knowledge of their collection subject area or identify and connect with those who are experts in the subject. If archives and libraries are to be relevant and responsive to the research interests of their users, they must seek out and identify the resources these users need through oral history, active collection development, and appraisal. If they do not hold the resources needed by current scholars, scholars will go elsewhere. In light of recent trends to study "archives" and their societal and institutional biases, archivists and librarians need to examine their role as historical mediators of history. As urged by Francis Blouin, informational professionals should evaluate archival processes continually and be attuned to changing patterns in the methods and materials of historical research.

What is the role of the archivist and librarian in oral history? In 1983, an oral historian offered this: "collaborator, critic, colleague, teacher, friend."[69] Archivists and librarians must acknowledge the importance of oral history to historical documentation, and at whatever level—creator, collector, appraiser—familiarize and engage themselves in its practice. The profession is being judged by the collections archives and libraries hold and the access they provide.

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[67] E-mail correspondence from James Fogerty to Ellen Swain, 21 December 2001, in possession of the author. This is an obvious truth when one compares the OHA interdisciplinary membership directory to that of SAA. According to David K. Dunaway, oral history of the 1990s is characterized by a "rising interdisciplinary." Dunaway and Baum, eds., *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 9.

[69] Grele, "Oral History and Archives," 15.