ALBANIA

In November 2006, staff from Southampton Oral History Unit held a three-day oral history training workshop at the University of Tirana. Padmini Broomfield (padmini.broomfield@southampton.gov.uk) sends this report of a new project in Albania:

‘The workshop and pilot project are being funded by the British Council’s Cultural Heritage Fund, which aims to support cultural heritage and environmental projects in the region and enable exchange of expertise between the UK and South East Europe.

‘Nineteen participants, including lecturers and students from the University, curators from the National Museum, State Archives and educators, attended the sessions held at the Department of History and Philology. During earlier consultations, several organisations had expressed an interest and an urgency in collecting the memories of the older generation before it was too late.

‘The training workshop introduced the participants to oral history methodology, project planning, recording equipment and making the material accessible. Through discussions and practical exercises, the group looked at the advantages of life story interviewing, formulating questions, listening skills and dealing with sensitive issues during interviews.

‘The group decided that the pilot project would prioritise older people who remembered the Second World War and the communist period and ten life story interviews would be recorded. The interviews will also explore changes in fashion since 1945 and how these were influenced by political ideology and contemporary events. The material collected will form the basis of a radio programme to be broadcast next year. The recordings will be deposited at the University and made available for research and further dissemination, including using them in museum exhibitions and intergenerational workshops in schools.

‘During the workshops, participants enthusiastically discussed several ideas for future projects. They all recognised the role oral history could play in documenting the troubled history of the country. As one participant put it: “Oral history is thought-provoking, challenging, exciting to collect, rewarding to use and historically vitally important if we are to have not only a more accurate picture of our past, but also a more rounded view. Oral history is the only type of history in which it is possible to question the makers of history face-to-face.”’

Southampton Oral History Unit: www.southampton.gov.uk/leisure/history/oralhistory

Below: Trainers and participants outside the department of History and Philology, University of Tirana.
CAMBODIA

Farina So (frnso@yahoo.com) sends this report from the Cham Muslim Oral History Project:

‘In 2005, the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC-Cam) launched its new project entitled “Outreach Activities for the Khmer Rouge Tribunal,” which is composed of three components: Cham Muslim Oral History Project, Buddhist Nuns’ Peace March and Forum, and Student Outreach for the Khmer Rouge Tribunal. The aim of the project is to get the public involved, measure public expectations from the tribunal, promote peace and reconciliation in Cambodia, and preserve Cham Muslim Oral History.

This article focuses on the Cham Muslim Oral History, of which there is evidence to suggest that the Khmer Rouge persecuted the Cham Muslims on religious and ethnic grounds (The stories of Cham Muslim survivors, http://www.dccam.org, 2005) However, their sufferings are little known. Thus, allowing their voices to be heard is crucial.

As part of our pre-trial outreach efforts, we are seeking to give Cambodians wider exposure to the Cham Muslim community by documenting their oral history. In addition, because few documents have been found on

the killings of Chams during Democratic Kampuchea, the recollections and testimonies of this community may be essential for the tribunal. Our research methodology is based heavily on participatory approach and in-depth interviews.

In August 2004, sixty-six representatives of the Cham community met with DC-Cam staff in Phnom Penh. Two important programmes were discussed and approved during the meeting: an oral history project and the development of a new website on Cham history and livelihood. They all unanimously agreed with the proposed programme. We have met with hundreds of Cham representatives on several occasions subsequently. We also have connections with the MUFTI (the Highest Islamic Religious Council in Cambodia) to run this project.

For the oral history component, we have been assisted by hakem (religious leaders) in developing and distributing questionnaires to 400 Cham village mosques throughout the country (this number represents the vast majority of Cambodia’s Cham population). They include twenty-four questions asking about the roots of the community and villagers’ experiences during the Khmer Rouge regime. To date, we have collected over 150 completed questionnaires. Because these questionnaires were filled in by the village and religious leaders, we feel that they are representative of the larger community.

In addition, we have visited approximately 100 mosques and completed 455 interviews with hakem (religious teacher), deputy hakem (religious leader), and villagers in both traditional and modern Cham communities (there are about thirty cham villages that still keep practising the Champa’s tradition.) We intend to publish these interviews in a special edition of DC-Cam’s magazine Searching for the Truth. It is our hope that these magazine articles will not only help to preserve the history of Cambodia’s Muslims but also promote understanding among other ethnic groups.

Like other ethnic minority groups, Cham Muslims were prohibited to practice Islamic religion and tradition, and their ethnicity and identity were devalued during the regime. Nevertheless, they persisted during the catastrophe in spite of the physical hardships they suffered.

Soon after the regime collapsed, Cham Muslims began reinventing what was lost. They worship together in mosques and are restarting their lives and reconstructing their communities. Remarkably, it is twenty-seven years since the fall of the killing fields, but there are very few records which describe what happened almost three decades ago. Today’s children know very little about their parents’ experiences, and thus these experiences are

Meeting with hakems and tuans in a mosque based in Kampong Cham province where over 100 Cham Muslim leaders were invited to listen to oral histories (2005).
The magazine is still in progress. We are calling for contributions in any form and appreciate any submissions or comments presented to us.

ITALY

Stuart Oglethorpe (stuart.oglethorpe@ucl.ac.uk) is researching rural central Italy in the period after World War Two. These years saw mechanisation and rural depopulation contribute to the breakdown of longstanding economic and social relationships. Using interviews alongside archival material, he is analysing the impact of these developments and how this time is remembered. He reports on a new initiative to set up a national oral history society for Italy, the Associazione Italiana di Storia Orale (AISO), whose inaugural meeting he attended in May 2006.

‘Italy has not to date had a well-established national association similar to the UK’s Oral History Society, despite forerunners such as Danilo Montaldi, Nuto Revelli and Gianni Bosio, the presence of oral history leading lights such as Luisa Passerini (based in Turin) and Alessandro Portelli (Rome), and much rich ongoing work on memory and oral history. When the International Oral History Association (IOHA) had its biennial conference in Rome in 2004, Portelli and the Circolo Gianni Bosio were given the task of redressing this situation.

The aim of a new association would be to promote communication and exchange between all those working with oral sources: individuals, groups, societies, institutions and archives. The Circolo Gianni Bosio, a cultural association based in Rome and dedicated to the study of oral history and popular folk music, committed itself to practical support for the start-up and initial phase of the new organisation. They have been joined in this by a partner organisation, Venice’s Società di Mutuo Soccorso Ernesto de Martino.

The 2004 IOHA conference was strongly supported by Rome’s mayor Walter Veltroni and his administration. Since then they have also supported the allocation and refurbishment of a building in the Trastevere area to host a range of organisations concerned with the conservation of memories of persecution and suppression under Fascism, and of the period of Resistance and Liberation.

This building, the Casa della Memoria e della Storia (‘House of Memory and History’) opened in March 2006, providing the new base for, among others, the Italian association for ex-partisans (ANPI), the national association of ex-deportees to Nazi camps (ANED), Rome’s Institute for Italian History from Fascism to the Resistance (IRSIFAR), the education section and sound/video archive of the Circolo Gianni Bosio, and the new Oral History organisation. An inaugural meeting of this body, the Associazione Italiana di Storia Orale (AISO), took place there on May 27th. Chaired by Alessandro Portelli, it was attended by some twenty-five people who in turn explained their involvement in and commitment to oral history work. A small executive committee was put in place. A second meeting was held on September 23rd, clearing up issues relating to the new body’s formal establishment, and confirming Portelli as President. This role will be taken on by Gabriella Gribaudi from January 2007. Professor Gribaudi, who is Director of the Sociology Department at the University of Naples, has written extensively on Naples and the Italian South and has given particular attention to issues of memory.
and the use of oral sources and audio-visual material.

A conference is being planned for March 2007, to take place at the Casa della Memoria, which will present the range and depth of oral history-based work currently in progress.

The Treasurer and administrative contact for the new organisation is Stefania Ficacci, AIS0 – Casa della Memoria e della Storia – via San Francesco di Sales, 5 – 00165 Rome, email a.s.storiaoraleitaliana@leonardo.it, tel 0039 329 715 4267. The association’s website is still at an early stage of development, but can be found at http://asstoriaoraleitaliana.leonardo.it/blog

The Casa della Memoria e della Storia is open from 10.00 am to 6.00 pm, Monday to Saturday. As well as providing a physical base for some organisations and a focal point for others, it hosts meetings, exhibitions, and other events. More information is available by ringing 0039 06 6876543, or by consulting the website: www.casadellamemoria.culturorama.it

Launch of new journal

A new journal, Memoria/memorie (‘Memory/memories’) is being launched by the Ettore Lucchini research centre of Padova, with the intention of featuring oral history and related work. While this is an independent venture, strong links have been made from the start with AIS0 (see above). The initial statement by the editors, Elisabetta Novello and David Celetti, underlines their commitment to making heard the ordinary person’s experience and interpretation of events, expressed through oral testimony, letters and diaries.

The first issue appears in January 2007 and will include articles dealing with aspects of the Italian Resistance. Contributions on particular themes have been invited for the second and third issues. Number 2 will deal with the history of the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL), Italy’s largest trade union confederation, which was set up in 1944 but was preceded by the socialist union federation CGL, founded in 1906 and suppressed in 1925 by the fascist regime. Its many constituent unions have spanned the labour market: from Federbraccianti, the old union for agricultural day labourers, to SPI, the union for Italian pensioners. The following issue, Number 3, will address the post-war Italian Constitution and the extension of the vote to Italy’s women in 1946.

As well as groups of articles on particular topics, the journal will have two other main parts: a section considering problems of methodology and historiography, and another looking at the conservation and archiving of material. Also, there will be reviews and information on current projects and forthcoming events. The editors hope to provide a forum for debate and exchange, to disseminate ideas and good practice, and to look beyond national boundaries.

For more information, the editors can be contacted by email (elisabetta.novello@unipd.it and david.celetti@unipd.it)

FINLAND

Outi Fingerroos (outfin@utu.fi) reports from the Department of Cultural Production and Landscape Studies, University of Turku, on oral history activities in Finland.

FOHN – Finnish Oral History Network

A group of Finnish oral historians have formed a network called the Finnish Oral History Network. This network consists of cultural studies scholars and historians from different universities. The activities of the network are international and the aim is to gain visibility. Despite these goals, it is not the aim of members of the network to establish a scientific society. Instead, the society aims to provide inspiring, free-form activities which are as open as possible. The society welcomes all scholars who take an interest in collecting and using oral history sources and materials, or related methodological issues.

The scholars of the Finnish Oral History Network have collaborated with researchers from Baltic countries, Northern countries and Russia. Close collaboration has resulted in the formation of the Nordic-Baltic Oral History Network. The idea of this network was first discussed in the thirteenth international conference of the International Oral History Association (IOHA) in Rome 2004. The conference participants included representatives from Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Russia and Latvia.

The first Nordic-Baltic meeting was arranged in Riga, Latvia in September 2004.

The network frequently arranges theme seminars on various subjects. Finnish, Estonian and Latvian scholars jointly organised a seminar, ‘War Memoirs in Life Histories’ in Tartu, in October 2005. Discussions on this theme were continued in Riga in January 2006, in Hamar, Norway, in April 2006, and here in Helsinki this week 2006. The main organiser and financier of different meetings has been the National Oral History Project, coordinated by Mara Zirnite in Riga. The Nordic-Baltic Oral History Network has also its own WebCT. WebCT is an online portal into which country-specific information of seminars and current projects can be added. The WebCT project is coordinated at the University of Tartu.

New publication

Elore is a scholarly online journal in Folklore Studies published by the Finnish Folklore Society (see: Elore 1/2006 [online]: http://cc.joensuu.fi/~loristi/). The themed issue of Elore, the Oral History Network in the Nordic and Baltic Context, is the first common publication by scholars from the Finnish Oral History Network. There was a demand for a book or a publication to be published in English, since the scholars did not share a common language or a publication forum and therefore did not receive information about oral history projects in the neighbouring areas. The themed issue of Elore is also the result of finding new ways to promote Nordic-Baltic oral history research for wider audiences.

In addition, the Finnish oral historians have edited a book called Muistitietokirja. Metodologisia kysymyksiä [translation: Oral History: Methodological Issues] published by the
Finnish Literature Society. The editorial staff of the book includes Outi Fingerroos, Riina Haanpää, Anne Heimo and Ulla-Maija Peltonen. The newest book is the first publication by scholars from the Finnish Oral History Network. Therefore individual members of the network are well represented in this book as authors and editors. There was a demand for a book to be published in Finnish, and therefore this collection is aimed as a reader primarily for university students – and for wider audiences.

The new book includes a Finnish translation of the classic article by Alessandro Portelli, “What Makes Oral History Different?” The authors, who represent a variety of disciplines – such as Folklore Studies, History, Ethnology, Comparative Religion and Women’s Studies – approach the historical background and methodological issues of oral history in Finland from different perspectives. As the articles of the book show, there are many different ways of doing oral history research depending on each researcher’s personal interests and scientific background.

**REPUBLIC OF IRELAND**

Marie-Annick Desplanques and Mary O’Driscoll (nfp@indigo.ie) send news from Cork about the Northside Folklore Project.

*The Northside Folklore Project (NFP), a community research archive was established in 1996 by The Department of Folklore and Ethnology at UCC, Northside Community Enterprises and FAS, to bridge gaps between academia and community. The recognition of urban oral history, folklore and popular culture and the important role of the holders of this knowledge were driving concepts behind the creation of NFP.*

Folklore collection is not alien to Irish people. The Irish Folklore Commission played a political role as a national institution, an educational role initially through its 1937-38 schools collection programme, a social role encouraging awareness of traditional culture leading to revival movements in music, dance, storytelling and other aspects of customary and material culture.

The dynamics and contexts however, have changed. Communication has blurred boundaries between the urban and the rural, the local and the global. It has significantly enhanced access to information and knowledge and to a degree democratised its production and dissemination. Awareness of cultural identity and ethnicity has contributed to the making of vibrant communities on this island and now the possibility is there to experience new dynamics and diversity.

Cork was designated European Capital of Culture in 2005 and NFP succeeded in obtaining official funding to produce the radio series *How’s it goin’, boy?* These six half-hour programmes are based on forty-two ethnographic interviews, (archived at NFP) representing a sample of the growing multi-ethnic population of Cork city. The programmes initially aired on University College Cork (UCC) Campus Radio, were rebroadcast on other community stations, and also issued as a box set of three CDs. *How’s it goin’, boy?* has now become a book (*Nonsuch, 2006*) incorporating many wonderful photographs from our archive.

*Sunbeam*, a short film co-produced with Frameworks Films, retraces the history of this textile factory from archival material and interviews with former workers. The film, applauded at the Cork international film festival and then aired on local television is available as part of *Cork Widescreen*, a DVD set of twelve community films.

On the strength of its recent achievements and on the growing importance of its multimedia archive, in 2006, NFP attracted funding from UCC presidential fund for its project: ‘Backlog Reduction and Enhancement of Archival Knowledge’ (BREAK). Besides the cataloguing of recent audio and visual collections (forty-two sound recordings, 2000 digital photographs and 2500 recently deposited prints), BREAK includes an online searchable multimedia database of NFP archive available on the newly revamped NFP website: www.ucc.ie/research/nfp, including the tenth anniversary issue of *The Archive* which by the time you read this will have gone up to eleven.

These developments were validated academically by the presentation of NFP’s work to international conferences at the University of Santiago de Compostela, Galicia which published the proceedings, at Memorial University of Newfoundland and at seminars at Université de Lille, France. Finally, it is important to stress these achievements would never have seen the light of day if it weren’t for the dedicated work of the NFP research team.

**SOUTH AFRICA**

Ann Day (awayday2@yahoo.co.uk) visited Cape Town recently and offers the following observations and updates on oral history in South Africa.

*‘It is now five years since Rob Perks visited South Africa and reported on his findings there in relation to the use of oral history at a number of heritage and museum sites (*Oral History*, vol 29, no 1, Spring 2001). I visited the District Six Museum, which continues to pursue its objectives in using the history of the District Six area to promote awareness of prejudice based on ‘racial’ difference. This is particularly aimed at young people in the local community and the Museum has established a number of educational initiatives with local schools and youth groups, encouraging them to use the Museum and its resources. For example, on the day of my visit there*
was a group of schoolchildren talking with Noor Ebrahim, an ex-resident of the District Six area and currently one of the Museum’s educational officers.

Noor guided them around the various exhibits and installations, exploring their visual and verbal significances in an effort to raise the children’s awareness of the apartheid system and how laws of segregation can affect particular communities and individual lives. For example, he talked about a bench inscribed with the words ‘EUROPEANS ONLY’ and told them what this had meant for him as a ‘coloured’ person. The weaving of his personal stories within the broader political narrative is a powerful way of translating the experiences of dislocation to a new generation of South Africans and demonstrates the importance that the Museum places on personal memories.

Oral testimonies are an integral part of the Museum’s main Digging Deeper exhibition. This consists of displays, maps, a fresco wall and reconstructed houses and shops, where tracks from the recordings are played to good effect. Particular emphasis is given to the direct involvement of ex-residents, as exemplified by Noor Ebrahim’s production of a book, Noor’s Story, My Life in District Six, which is a testimony of his life and experiences in District Six. In this he states, ‘We were ordinary people, living a rich and satisfying life. We cared for each other and about each other. And when it ended, I thought my happiness had received a blow from which it would never recover. Who would have thought that, with the establishment of the District Six Museum, there would be a return of meaning into my life’ (p 83). The Museum has also acquired another site two blocks away in the same street, Sacks Futeran, which serves as their Homecoming Centre. This is used for temporary exhibitions, talks, music and performance programmes and there are free open days every month. There is now an entrance fee of R15 (just over £1) for the main Museum and charges for District Six walking tours and visitor numbers are very buoyant.

Under plans for a Heritage Impact Assessment for District Six, created in 2003, a set of guidelines was established to ensure that future redevelopment ‘would remain sensitive to the history and context of District 6’. A new exhibition in the Museum entitled Memory Traces depicts the shift from the current work of the Museum ‘as a site museum of consciousness’ towards the establishment of a Memorial Park as one element in an expanded focus for ‘sites of memory and intangible heritage’, thereby reflecting the tenets of the Assessment. The Memorial Park will be a focal space in the redevelopment and one that will be crucial in facilitating an ongoing memorialisation of the enforced removals from the District Six area during the 1960s and 1970s. It will consist of an open green area that will act as a ‘space of reflection’ for local residents and for visitors to this historically-important part of Cape Town.

As Valmont Layne, Director of the Museum, says: ‘I think we need to build a community that’s true to the idea of District Six. And I say “the idea” deliberately because we’re not rebuilding District Six. We are taking the idea of District Six and applying it to a new set of circumstances, so there has to be innovation as well as reflection on the past’ (District Six Museum textboard). Clearly the return of ex-residents to new housing in the District Six area is a hugely significant part of the redevelopment plans and, most importantly, the continuing work of the Museum enables it to act as ‘… a definitive platform to inform and stimulate perceptions which lead to transforma-
tion and nation building in a positive and non-confrontational manner’ (District Six Museum brochure).

The Jewish Museum in Cape Town is another location where a history of persecution and intolerance is evidenced through a much more technologically-driven set of displays and installations than in the District Six Museum. The initial section of the Museum, which is housed in the first Jewish synagogue built in Cape Town in 1863, consists of installations and displays which used to convey the immigration experience for many Eastern European Jews fleeing from persecution in their own countries.

The thrust of their stories is one of triumph over adversity and how the entrepreneurial zeal of many Jewish businessmen and industrialists contributed to the successful development of South Africa. Oral history is introduced for the more recent history of the Jewish presence in South Africa, where it is used very effectively to demonstrate their involvement in the struggle for human rights under the apartheid system. A time-line of legislation reveals that the effects of anti-Semitism had already manifested themselves in 1937 with the introduction of the Aliens Act, resulting in the virtual cessation of Jewish migration to South Africa from Nazi Germany. But with the establishment of a formalised apartheid system from 1948, for many South African Jews anti-Semitism became even more pronounced. A powerful message of resistance to oppression is disseminated through video interviews with a range of Jewish people, alongside film footage from the period.

Together with extracts from recorded interviews on textboards, these media are used to transmit and contextualise the efforts of people such as Helen Suzman (a founder member of the Progressive Party), Ray Alexander (a trade union activist) and Ruth First (a member of the Communist Party) to gain recognition for the rights of black and coloured people in South Africa. Suzman says that many high-ranking Jewish members of the anti-apartheid movement ‘... understood what oppression was about and that they felt empathy with the black population and wanted to be part of their struggle’. An interview with Nelson Mandela demonstrates the links between Jewish and black people in this struggle. Mandela claims that ‘In my experience I have found Jews to be more broad-minded than most whites on issues of race and politics, perhaps because they themselves have historically been victims of prejudice.’ However, as Max and Audrey Cohen, founder members of the Detainees Support Group, point out in their interview, ‘... at the other end of the scale there have been many Jews who supported apartheid and accepted the privileges and enjoyed the fruits of those privileges.’ This is a good example of how oral testimonies can be used to reveal different perspectives on a controversial subject, rather than only offering what could perhaps be a reverential view of Jewish involvement in the anti-apartheid movement.

I also visited the Holocaust Centre, which is across a courtyard from the Jewish Museum. As Rob Perks points out in his earlier review of oral history in South Africa, the Centre makes excellent use of oral history to contextualise the Jewish experience within the wider issues of ‘anti-Semitism, intolerance and persecution in Europe and South Africa ...’ (News from Abroad, Oral History, vol 29, no 1, Spring 2001, p 23). In the final section of the Centre there are current photographs and brief biographies of
Jewish survivors of the Holocaust who migrated to South Africa during the post-war period. Opposite this display is a small auditorium showing a film, called Testimony (made in 1999 for the Holocaust Centre) based on the lives of five individuals who survived the death camps and settled in South Africa. The photographs and the film leave the visitor with an emotive experience where they share ‘the pain of their past’ with the survivors. A final quotation from Archbishop Desmond Tutu encapsulates the purpose of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre.

‘We learn about the Holocaust so that we can become more human, more gentle, more caring, more compassionate, valuing every person as being of infinite worth so precious that we know such atrocities will never happen again and the world will be a more humane place’.

As the Cape Town Holocaust Centre is the only one on the African continent, it is an important site of remembrance for African people, who themselves have suffered ‘unchecked racial discrimination and xenophobia’ (Cape Town Holocaust Centre brochure). The enforced resettlements of District Six residents is an obvious example of such discrimination, but these Cape Town museums certainly endeavour to fulfil the new South African government’s objectives to understand and educate through a process of forgiveness and reconciliation.

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James Gregory (gregoryj@u.washington.edu) and Trevor Griffey write from the Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project, a public history website featuring more than seventy online oral histories. Intended for use in classrooms as well as by scholars, the project provides the most complete set of resources about civil rights struggles for any city outside the South.

‘Seattle, like other western cities, has a long history of multiracial political activism. African Americans joined with Chinese Americans, Filipino Americans, Japanese Americans, Jews, and Native Americans in contesting racial segregation. The project details these efforts while also exploring the relationship between civil rights and labor struggles throughout the twentieth century.

‘Based at the University of Washington (UW), the project features dozens of articles, hundreds of photographs and documents, several short films and slide shows, all in addition to the oral histories with veterans of Seattle’s many civil rights movements. The oral histories are presented in streaming video, not as complete interviews but broken up into captioned excerpts averaging two to five minutes. This format makes it easy for users to scan content.

‘The Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project shows how academic historians can produce history that makes a difference. Taught in dozens of schools and colleges by teachers who are looking for ways to introduce the local dimensions of segregation and civil rights history, the project has also been the subject of considerable press and public attention.

‘Last spring the project even helped change state law. One of the highlights is a database of racial restrictive covenants and deed restrictions that served for several generations as an important instrument of residential segregation. Although no longer enforceable, restrictive covenants today remain part of the legal property descriptions in many neighborhoods in the city and in its suburbs. With more than 400 racial covenants documented, our database is the most extensive collection in the country. The database in turn has caused quite a stir,'
Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project

Seattles has a unique civil rights history that challenges the way we think about race, civil rights, and the Pacific Northwest. Civil rights movements in Seattle started well before the civil rights struggles in the South in the 1950s and 1960s. The Seattle movements ended not just on African American affairs but also Filipino Americans, Japanese Americans, Chinese Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans. They also depended upon the support of some elements of the regions labor movement. From the 1970s through the 1980s, labor and civil rights were intertwined in complicated ways, with some union and civil rights organizations providing critical support to struggles for racial justice, while others stood in the way.

This multimedia web site brings the rich history of Seattle's civil rights movements to life through dozens of oral histories, hundreds of rare photographs, documents, newspaper articles, and personal biographies. Based at the University of Washington, the Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project is a collaboration between community groups and UW faculty and students. Each month more and more stories and materials appear on this site. Here's more about the project.

Tour the Project

Archival Oral Histories We have interviewed dozens of oral history sources. You can watch video excerpts and read enhancements.

Special Sections

- Seattle Black Panther Party History and Memory Project
- Labor Press Project
- Segregated Seattle

For information about the Seattle Civil Rights and Labor History Project please visit the main website: www.civilrights.washington.edu or via email at civilr@u.washington.edu

Amanda Durst (amgoss@netbsa.org) contributes an account of oral history work taking place at the National Scouting Museum (NSM), Irving, USA.

Every scout has a story. This is what I have learned while working at the NSM. Sometimes it just takes a couple of minutes for a scout to begin to expound on their scouting adventures. Other times it takes a little patience before they begin to open up. But whatever the wait, the story is always worth it.

Stories, memories, abound in this place. The docents are more than happy to share their experiences with the visitor, every shared memory bringing more life to objects in our presentation cases. If you listen, the visitor also share memories with one another, passing down bits of scouting wisdom from one scout to the next.

The camping trip where it rained with one match” was triangular in shape, so it was like a muffler around your neck.”

But whatever the wait, the story is always worth it.

For some, it’s the thrill of a pinewood derby race. For others, it’s memories of aiding their country by hosting scrap drives and growing Victory gardens. Some stories vary from generation to generation, others always stay the same.

We at the NSM have begun to collect these memories. Preserving them on film and tape for generations to come. So far we have had great success, adding many memories to our archives.

Tom Fallon recounted to me via email: “On May 3, 1937 at a Court of Honor in Watchung School, Mr Dan Beard pinned the Eagle badge on my shirt. Dan must have been in his high eighties. He was Mr Boy Scout USA. Today my Eagle certificate and my lifetime Eagle certificate hang proudly in my office along with my Eagle badge in a shadow box frame. I feel sorry for kids that grow up without this experience.”

I had the pleasure of listening to Geoffrey Miller, a new Eagle Scout who told me of the difficulties he had in his scouting career. A wheelchair user, he completed the program, and beamed as he spoke of the 1,000+ toys which he had arranged to be donated to the Scottish Rite Hospital as his Eagle project.

Our very own docent Ernest Doclar reminisced about his first scout uniform: “I remember, my parents bought a complete uniform for me. Except for the hat. The hat was one of those Smokey Bear type hats. It was made of felt, it was kind of expensive, so my folks chose to wait a while to get me the hat. Eventually I got one second hand from one of the kids that was no longer in scouting. It didn’t fit too well but I would just squash it on my head and make sure it fit”; “I remember mostly that it was terribly, terribly warm to wear that uniform, especially if we had a neckerchief. At that time it was a full 36” x 36” and you would fold it diagonally so that it was triangular in shape, so it was like a muffler around your neck.”
Another of the museum’s docents, Jim Dunkley shared his camping experiences: “My most memorable scouting adventures were at summer camp. Our scout troop was assigned to Camp Dan Beard, high above Lake Crystal’s water in among the trees, at Owassippe, the Chicago Area Scout Camp, in Michigan, during 1943-1945. We traveled to camp via the railroad from downtown Chicago to a rail head in southern Michigan, when the scout troops hiked to Camp Beard. I remember well, Mr Heppe’s routine of the first person up in the morning to take care of his personal hygiene...lathering up and shaving with a straight edge razor. The two weeks at camp seemed endless the first year....”

Harley E Erb recalled: “Well of course in 1912, I became a boy scout. Two years after scouting came to this country. My first troop unfortunately had a scoutmaster who was a military man, a Major White. He thought that scouting was drilling up and down the street, and that didn’t appeal to us at all. The troop didn’t last well because of that, but there was another troop in town quite close to my home that I joined. They liked to hike and they believed in advancement and rank and the handbook, and they had a program that appealed to boys. That was the happiest experience that I had as a scout in that troop.”

Distinguished Eagle Scout Ross Perot recently shared his scouting story disclosing: “Going to that meeting and having all those principals of scouting reinforced once a week, and then setting the goals and objectives to make Eagle in minimal time...those were great lessons that have really been beyond helpful to me all through my life. It’s just an honor to be associated with scouting.”

Scouting’s history is our history. The program is simple, we are looking to hear the stories, the history of anyone who has been or is involved with scouting. Den mothers, scouts, cubs, professionals, scoutmasters, camp staff, anyone who has participated in scouting. All people have to do is be willing to share their story. It only takes thirty to ninety minutes and can be done at their convenience. We provide a copy of the story on DVD or CD to share with family and friends. Please contact 972-580-2426 or at amgoss@netbsa.org for further information.”

Vaughn Oliver (centre) and his two brothers.

News from abroad is compiled by Michelle Winslow who welcomes all kinds of contributions by email: m.winslow@sheffield.ac.uk