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Oral History Projects

Oral history collections are recent developments in many libraries. The pursuit and advocacy of oral history began primarily after World War II, and the importance of oral history has been acknowledged by both large and small communities. Institutions and individuals cannot ignore the valuable insights about community developments and events that can be retrieved only by the implementation of oral history programs. The rich, varied experiences of every individual in the community bring a new, different interpretation to the community's development. A complete picture of a community's history is impossible, but with oral history projects, a more accurate picture may be ascertained by historians in their pursuit for truth.

The four articles in this issue present many viewpoints on oral history. In "Oral History and Libraries," David C. Tambo, Head of Special Collections at Ball State University, gives an introduction to and an overview of oral history. Tambo's informative article provides librarians with a starting point, a first place to examine for definitions, interpretations, assets and liabilities of oral history. For readers desiring further information, he has provided a bibliography; entries are in major categories and annotated when warranted.

The next two articles illustrate the oral history programs underway at two Indiana public libraries. Barbara Elliott, Assistant Director, Bluffton-Wells County Public Library, describes "The Oral History Collection at Bluffton-Wells County Public Library," and Linda L. Robertson, Director, Wabash Carnegie Public Library, discusses that library's program in "Oral History—Alive and Doing Well in Wabash." Both libraries made a commitment to establish and maintain oral history programs and have endeavored to strengthen

local collections with these supplements. The Honeywell project at Wabash, Robertson states, "was accepted at Columbia University for its collection of business history oral histories." Local projects, as on this occasion, may relate to the national scene.

J. Paul Mitchell, Professor at Ball State University, presents an oral history practitioner's point of view. He discusses frankly his involvement in oral history projects, including his frustrations, insights, elations, and techniques. Mitchell also notes "the difference between a project that is intended to create transcripts for a collection and one that is intended to produce a written history or study based on oral history." This is a "difference" that librarians should recognize and of which they should be cognizant.

After reading this issue and before beginning an oral history program, librarians will want to examine the state-wide endeavors of F. Gerald Handfield, Jr., and the publications of Indiana University and Indiana Historical Bureau. These will provide the foundation for those seriously considering oral history.

Indiana Libraries will begin volume 5 as an occasional publication. The first theme issue will be "Online Searching." The Special Guest Editor for this issue will be Eileen McGrath of Wabash College.

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