An Editorial Note

The rising tide of social history in America in the 1960s, '70s and '80s provided impetus for expansion of the relatively new field of Oral History. In the '90s, as new themes in history writing develop—among them an increasing focus on "textuality"—Oral History continues to thrive. Scholars and community activists alike have recognized that everyone has a story to tell, and have devoted themselves in individual and group projects to getting many of them told. Embracing the broad spectrum of ethnicity, class, and gender, oral history projects in Pennsylvania and throughout the nation are enriching our understanding of the American past.

Publishing this issue of Pennsylvania History has been a priority virtually from the outset of my tenure as editor. Working with scholars doing histories of labor and politics, and to a lesser extent, folklorists, I have become aware of the remarkable energy and substance of oral history efforts in the Commonwealth, whether undertaken to complement more standard sources of scholarly research, for the particular purpose of understanding better the processes of memory, or for the creation of specific oral history archives. Two years ago, I asked Linda Shopes of the Pennsylvania Historical Museum Commission—herself an accomplished practitioner in the field—if she would consider guest editing an issue of this journal devoted to the state of Oral History in Pennsylvania. Once Linda signed on, she conceived and has now brought to fruition an issue that samples and assesses an increasingly important historical enterprise. Linda and I would be the first to concede that the contents of this issue cannot be the last word about what people are doing or could be doing with Oral History. But we believe that in critical ways we are providing an entree into Oral History as practiced today. We trust that this issue will provide context and guidance for those now working on Oral History in Pennsylvania, and hope that it will spur others to share their work.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and its executive director, Brent D. Glass, for supporting this enterprise. It is typical of Brent Glass’s ongoing cooperation with the Pennsylvania Historical Association.

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