Varieties of Oral History

Among the tools used by historians to craft accounts of the past, oral history is among the most versatile. It can be used to research a variety of subjects, especially when more traditional forms of documentation are unavailable. Because personal testimony is often quite specific, personal, and compelling, oral history also lends itself to a variety of pedagogical situations and presentational modes. It is an especially useful medium for those historians who wish to communicate with nonscholarly audiences, including museum-goers and those interested in the history of their own locale. The four brief essays grouped below address some of the uses to which oral history can be put from the documentation of a museum’s collection to the development of a videotape, from a college history course assignment to the recording of traditional local culture. Each author outlines the way he/she has used this source and addresses some of the practical and interpretive issues its use has raised. Collectively they suggest some of the opportunities for an expanded view of the past that oral history opens up for both the historian and the nonspecialist. —Ed.

Oral History and the Collection at the Kemerer Museum of Decorative Arts

Sarah W. LeCount

Old Sturbridge Village

Annie Susen Grim Kemerer was not an unusual woman. She lived her life (1865-1951) in and around Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the daughter of a successful gristmill owner and the wife of a real estate developer. She and her family lived quietly. After the death of her only child and then her husband, Mrs. Kemerer turned to collecting antiques to escape her grief. By the 1940s, however, when she decided to put her affairs in order, Mrs. Kemerer made an unusual decision. Recognizing the educational value of her collection, she used her will to establish a museum.

The Annie S. Kemerer Museum was incorporated in 1954. Mrs. Kemerer’s collection, an eclectic accumulation of furniture, glass, ceramics, and other types of
decorative arts, form the core of the museum. The collection was housed in a residential building constructed in 1848, in galleries primarily designed as room settings. These groupings of furniture mixed styles and time periods while giving visitors the impression that they were viewing period rooms. The volunteer docents of the museum perceived Mrs. Kemerer to be a wealthy, knowledgeable collector. They concentrated on telling visitors what little was known about her life as well as anecdotal information about the collection. Although many donors gave generous, important gifts to the collection in the years between 1954 and 1988, much of the interpretation continued to be centered on Mrs. Kemerer.

In 1988 the staff and trustees of the museum recognized the need to define more clearly the institution's mission. They identified the strongest portion of the collection—a concentration of pieces made or used in the Lehigh Valley, ca. 1750-1880—as the central point of interpretation. As a public announcement of this shift in focus, the name of the museum was changed to the Kemerer Museum of Decorative Arts. The staff then developed a two-fold plan to improve the interpretation of the collection. First, each gallery would be reinstalled to highlight the decorative arts of the Lehigh Valley. Second, an oral history project would be conducted to expand and document our knowledge of Mrs. Kemerer in order to better interpret her and her collection. This interpretation would be mostly confined to one space, the Founder's Room.

In 1989 the museum initiated an oral history study of the life of Annie Grim Kemerer. Staff and volunteers undertook the project with no prior experience in oral history. The project coordinator read books and consulted with local oral historians before selecting an interviewer, preparing a list of interview questions, and soliciting the community for interviewees. Through personal contacts, newspaper and newsletter publicity, and word of mouth, seventeen subjects were identified. In addition, city directories, family genealogies, wills, probate inventories, and obituaries were searched for information about Mrs. Kemerer and her family.

The seventeen interviews are consistent in their description of Mrs. Kemerer, her family, and her property. Most of the subjects had been young children or teenagers when they knew Mrs. Kemerer; they were children of her acquaintances. Their memories were built of things that would impress a child: a big house, horses, lots of glass and other things to look at in her home, a kind hostess who took an interest in them. One informant recalled that Mrs. Kemerer often commented on her clothes and was quite complimentary when she learned that the young girl had made one of her own dresses. The same informant remembered
that Mrs. Kemerer gave an annual ice cream party for students in the elementary school across from her home and that she paid for the burial of a neighbor’s young son. Another informant visited Mrs. Kemerer every Saturday after attending a movie in the theater next door.

Another group of interview subjects had been young adults interested in antiques, drawn to Mrs. Kemerer by a mutual friend or mutual interest. They too had fond memories. Invited into her home to see the things she had gathered, they remembered more about how the collection was used and Mrs. Kemerer’s method of collecting. Based on their own knowledge of antiques, this group agreed that Mrs. Kemerer was not an expert or scholar; she relied on the advice of two or three friends to build her collection. Aside from her love of antique glass, Mrs. Kemerer did not concentrate her interests in any particular area; she seemed to purchase whatever piece of furniture, glass, ceramic, etc. that caught her eye. Although this group generally described Mrs. Kemerer as comfortable rather than wealthy, they did recall that she was prepared to pay whatever price was necessary to secure the pieces she wanted. We learned that she traveled to auctions, antique shows, and shops in the Lancaster area, Philadelphia, and the Poconos and also purchased pieces directly from friends and acquaintances. She apparently even sent one of her advisors as far as Virginia to visit a particular dealer. Unfortunately, this group of informants did not have many memories about specific objects in the collection or specific dealers, shops, or auctions. These informants described Mrs. Kemerer as being “lovely,” “sweet,” “very private,” and “very generous.”

Finally, two subjects had been involved with transforming her estate into a museum. They were helpful in establishing Mrs. Kemerer’s motivations for starting the museum and her place in Bethlehem society. Mrs. Kemerer’s lawyer recalled that one of her advisors helped her decide that the collection should become a museum. She did not want her own house to be used for the museum but requested that it be sold and the proceeds used to endow the institution. The gentleman who supervised the removal of the collection from Mrs. Kemerer’s home and the development of the museum space felt that the collection was typical of others held in private hands in midtwentieth century Bethlehem, in that it was an eclectic mixture of inherited and purchased pieces with no particular focus. The difference was that Mrs. Kemerer believed in the educational value of objects and wished to see future generations benefit from her years of collecting.

After gathering the oral histories, it was time to develop the Founder’s Room.
The gallery was designed to look as much as possible like the dining room of Mrs. Kemerer's home. For example, wall and window treatments, floor coverings, and furniture choices were all based on a photograph of the room taken shortly after her death. Incorporating the oral history information into the docents' interpretation proved more difficult than recreating the physical setting. As nearly all of the informants had consistently positive memories of Mrs. Kemerer, it is easy to believe that she was a kind, generous, caring person. The museum tempers this, however, with the knowledge that most of the informants were self-selected. The docents, trained through written gallery notes as well as oral presentations on the project, explain to visitors that the generally positive perspective on Mrs. Kemerer was gained through interviewing a very small number of people who knew her at a particular time and who shared certain interests with her. They also discuss her collection and how she built it, her eclectic tastes, and her dependence on friendly advisors to determine quality, citing the oral history project again. As we obtained no information on particular objects in the collection, we have eliminated most of the anecdotal stories once told throughout the museum.

Some of the information we elicited is more difficult to deal with. Many of the informants identified her son Jacob's suicide in 1921 as a turning point in Mrs. Kemerer's life. One commented, "She kept the room where it happened like a shrine." The museum staff is uncomfortable with announcing the incident to visitors, who may have experienced similar events in their own family. We are perhaps overly cautious, suggesting that docents say that Jacob died a tragic death—and explain further if there are any questions. Several informants suggested causes for Jacob's suicide, but we do not discuss these in deference to his memory.

The staff and volunteer docents of the Kemerer Museum believe the oral history interviews enable them to present a more accurate picture of Annie Grim Kemerer. Rather than presenting her as a wealthy matron who had a knowledge of antiques and a desire to build a consistent collection as they had done previously, they now described her as a woman of comfortable means who loved being surrounded by old objects and who purchased pieces that caught her eye on the advice of a circle of friends. It was her belief in the educational value of objects and her desire to have her collection used by future generations that led this unremarkable woman to establish a noteworthy museum.
Notes
1. Interview with Pearl Frantz, 23 February 1990.
2. Interview with Pat Taylor, 9 February 1990.
3. Interview with Marion Leidig, 17 February 1990, and with Raydell Kemerer Person, 14 February 1990.
8. Interview with Tamar Bair, 5 February 1990.

Oral History and the Making of a Video Documentary
By Jim Dougherty
AIHP/IUP Folklife Documentation Center on Coal Mining

The oral tradition about life in central Pennsylvania's coal fields during the early part of the twentieth century is rapidly disappearing. The combination of physical disability, death, the fragmentation of the extended family, and the decline of traditional social and recreational settings has narrowed the possibilities for those interested in finding out more about living and working conditions in this important part of Pennsylvania's industrial heritage. Another factor contributing to the difficulty of learning about this subject is the fear many miners and their family members still have of receiving some sort of reprisal from the coal companies if they speak critically of what happened to them or any of their relatives in years past. Others simply don't want to talk about the era because it evokes unpleasant memories.

The Folklife Documentation Center on Coal, under the sponsorship of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP) and Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), is responding to this situation by collecting oral histories with those who worked or lived in the state's bituminous fields and combining them with other sources to make the information more accessible to wider audiences through the use of video. The production of a fifty-six minute, two-part program entitled The Struggle for an American Way of Life: Coal Miners and Operators in Central Pennsylvania, 1919-1933 (1992) is the Center's first effort in this regard.

The reality of a fading oral tradition influenced me to look beyond first-hand accounts from miners and their families to tell the coal story of the 1920s. The documentary thus mixes personal testimony with contextualizing commentary from three prominent scholars and an overview narration of events and themes.
In 1922 coal miners struck nationwide for better wages and working conditions, as well as union recognition. As this photograph from the United Mine Workers Journal attests, striking miners and their families in Western Pennsylvania were evicted from their company-owned homes.

Admittedly, using the voice of an omniscient, unseen narrator is an unpopular technique among many contemporary documentary filmmakers and film theorists, for it can allow a filmmaker to fall into the trap of telling the story rather than letting the people whom the film may be about to tell it. Yet, this is a problem all filmmakers face, even those who totally rely upon “the people’s voice”: the final outcome of an oral history based video or film is the product of a filmmaker who, much like a writer, edits and selects how the story board is arranged and which voices are to be heard.

Because I was drawing upon two different set of narrators, the rank-and-file and scholars, I had to develop different approaches for interviewing each group and for integrating the diversity of sources. I initially recorded interviews with the rank-and-file on audio cassette tape as open-ended conversations. One subject was interviewed for a total of four hours on three different occasions. The others were interviewed for approximately an hour-and-a-half each. After reviewing the tapes and comparing these findings to my ongoing research, I reinterviewed four subjects on video tape to get concise statements of key elements covered in the
audio interviews that were crucial to the video's emerging story board. Most of these comments were about living conditions in the coal patch and narrators' perspectives on the company, the union, and the local judicial system. I contacted the rank-and-file through their own social networks: a local historian referred me to my initial subject who in turn referred me to another, and so forth.

The academic interview subjects were chosen for their recognized expertise in the field: Melvyn Dubofsky, co-author of John L. Lewis: A Biography (1976), Gary Gerstle, author of Working Class Americanism (1990), and Alan Singer who has researched Nant-Y-Glo, a small coal town in northern Cambria County. I prepared for their interviews by surveying their research and developing broad topical questions that connected their findings to the story of the coal industry in the 1920s. I then conducted an hour-long videotaped interview with each of the scholars. Their accounts were subsequently integrated into a larger evolving narrative, which ultimately developed, after selective editing, into the film script.

Both before and during the interviews I had been reviewing local newspapers, the United Mine Workers Journal, industry journals such as Coal Age and the Black Diamond, and extant interviews, as well as conducting informal conversations with local residents. The archives of central Pennsylvania's District 2 of the United Mine Workers of America, which is located at IUP, provided letters, photographs, and other contemporary historical documents. All the narratives were, therefore, compared to other written and verbal sources to verify their accuracy.

The outcome of this complex process gives the viewer a glimpse into one of the state's unpleasant periods of labor-management relations. The Struggle for an American Way of Life identifies and follows the major trends of the 1920s that helped influence and shape the return of the United Mine Workers of America to the coal fields of southwestern Pennsylvania in the 1930s, including worker-management struggles over unionization within the context of the American tradition. The video is intended for students who have an interest in labor history, social history, cultural studies, political history, and/or Pennsylvania history. A ninety-six-page complementary study guide has also been prepared to enhance the value of the project and make the video more appealing to instructors at the secondary and collegiate levels, who have, in most cases, been somewhat tentative in their acceptance of video and film as a teaching mechanism. This guide includes three narratives, study questions, a glossary of terminology, biographical sketches of major historical figures in the 1920s coal story, and a chronology of major events related to the state's bituminous coal industry in the nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries. Although it lacks some of the dramatic appeal of films like *The Good Fight* (1984) or *Atomic Cafe* (1984), *The Struggle for an American Way of Life* can serve as a starting point for those interested in the development of the coal industry in the early twentieth century and the role played by operators, the union, the government, and rank-and-file workers and their family members.

Notes
1. America's Industrial Heritage Project is a project under development by the United States National Park Service to revive the economy of south-central Pennsylvania by preserving the industrial heritage of the region for tourism. Its central goal is to provide visitors a window on the development of the industrial revolution in the United States. The Folklife Division of the project has six centers that investigate different aspects of the region, one of which is the Folklife Center on Coal Mining at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Oral History in the Classroom

By Mary M. Schweitzer
Villanova University

For the past eight years I have used oral history as a means of accomplishing several teaching goals for my undergraduate students at Villanova University. Obviously, oral history can be used to help students access the recent past. Interviews with people who lived through events or time periods can give students a better understanding of what happened. Because they are interviewing family members, they can see, for example, how the depression affected decisions and beliefs that, a generation or two later, would leave an impact on their lives. But
there is far more to using oral history in a classroom than sending the students out to talk to their grandparents about the old days.

Conducting and working with oral interviews involves students in the process of developing a historical interpretation. The same goal can be achieved, of course, through the use of printed primary documents. However, many students today (even those in a university of the caliber of Villanova) are unfamiliar with and awkward around printed material. In their daily lives, they are far more used to visual and aural communication; too many of them perceive print mainly as an arcane medium used by educators to make their lives more difficult. Oral interviews allow the students to begin the process of historical interpretation using a format with which they tend to be more comfortable.

The process of committing the interviews to paper, and later compiling the interviews into a booklet, then involves the students in the use of print as a friendly rather than hostile medium. I offer them the option of directly transcribing the interview or paraphrasing it; most prefer to paraphrase. What appears to be a simple act of transcription thus, in practice, becomes a rudimentary writing assignment. There are no grades given for this assignment; it is either completed or it is not. My students know that their interviews will be compiled and circulated among their classmates. The incentive for providing an interesting and readable interview comes from the desire to communicate their relatives' experiences to their classmates, rather than a desire to please the professor and receive a good grade. Students who were indifferent to other written class projects suddenly shine at this one: football players, accountants, engineering students—the ones who really hate writing—take off with this assignment and deliver wonderfully crafted interviews.

The interviews, however, are only part of the project. A second difficulty my students have in conceptualizing the process of historical interpretation is their inexperience in weighing evidence. They tend to take a Time Magazine approach: everyone has an "opinion," and all opinions are equally valid. They think that the process of conducting research means to collect a lot of opinions and string them together into an interesting story. But historical interpretation involves more than simply collecting opinions. A single individual is seldom situated to be able to observe all of the evidence. Historians must analyze the particular perspective that the witness has brought to his or her account. They must weigh conflicting observations from different individuals as well as physical and statistical information that might have been unavailable to the immediate participants. Finally, in the search for an explanation (the story that the students want to piece together from opinion
alone), historians must often confront conflicting theories of causation. They thus need to be familiar not only with first-person accounts of direct observation, but also with other types of evidence that are available and with the interpretations and evidence offered by other historians who have tried to explain the same events.

How does the oral history assignment work in practice? Every year in the spring I teach a survey course in United States history since 1877. Most of the students are not going to be history majors; most of them are not even liberal arts majors. This course may well be their only experience with the historical profession on my campus. I have used the experience of immigration, but more often I ask my students to interview family members about the Great Depression. Neither they nor I have the time for a real literature search, but before they are sent out to do the interviews, they are required to approximate the process of consulting the secondary literature on the Great Depression and the New Deal. We use the textbook for basic information, and I deliver two lectures on the subject. I explain that it is unprofessional, sloppy, and potentially embarrassing to conduct interviews without doing some background research. They are therefore required to know (that means memorize) the basic statistical parameters of the Great Depression: the bracket years, the percentage unemployed, the drop in GNP and prices, etc. They must memorize a certain amount of the "alphabet soup" of New Deal programs and the names of the major players. Students who skip class or fail to learn the material end up being lectured by their grandparents on FDR instead of learning about their family's experiences.

The textbook and the lectures also serve to introduce the students to existing historical debates. What were the causes of the depression? How bad was it? How did it end? What was the role of government? Could it happen again? Was there a difference in philosophy between the First New Deal and the Second? What other policies were proposed and rejected? Was Roosevelt an opportunist, or a savior, or something in between? Or irrelevant? How did the experience of the depression affect the generation of Americans who lived through it, and how has it affected the direction of politics since? What is the relationship between the New Deal and earlier political movements, particularly populism and progressivism?

The students also read Studs Terkel's *Hard Times* (1970). I use the book to introduce them to some of the techniques of oral history and also to the pitfalls. We discuss the problems of selective memory and of perspective. We also discuss the ways in which the problems of oral history are similar to those encountered by
any historian in using many different types of evidence.

After the students have handed in their interviews and shared what they have learned, I transcribe the interviews and sort them into common categories of experience. For example, I put all of the descriptions of job-hunting in one section and all of the descriptions of community support in another. As most of the interviews were paraphrased rather than exactly transcribed, the words are the students' own. The result is their own book. I do exit it for glaring grammatical mistakes (of which there are far too many). I wish they had time to perform the editing tasks themselves, but they do not. The resulting booklet is fascinating to read, quite different than Terkel's because there is more repetition of common experiences. The students' combined interviews provide a nicely balanced picture of the whole population being sampled (in this case, generally eastern urban ethnic Catholic, working and middle class).

It is important that the students see the combined interviews. It helps them to think about the particularity and generality of all experience. A story that seemed unique turns out to have been fairly common ("we put cardboard in our shoes when the soles wore out"). A "fact" stated as if it were universally true appears rather to have stemmed from a relatively atypical experience ("there were always jobs available for anyone who really wanted to work"). I find myself personally fascinated by stories that keep reappearing in the interviews: "relief" clothes that the Pennsylvania government or a local Philadelphia charity handed out (easily identifiable and despised by the children who had to wear them); graft in the administration of the Works Progress Administration in New York City; designated unpaid workdays in lieu of lowered salaries; a well-remembered First Communion dress that appeared mysteriously from an anonymous donor; many stories of losses in bank failures but comparatively few direct experiences with the stock market; local government workers paid in scrip instead of currency.

In the end, it matters that I truly like these booklets and that the students do as well. It is one way I can share with them my own love of historical research; they in turn share with me their excitement and pride in the interviews. At least momentarily, we are all released from the tyranny of grade point averages. Students emerge not only with a deeper knowledge of the experience of the Great Depression but also with a much better understanding of the discipline of history. And perhaps some interest in it.

Notes
Oral History and the Documentation of Local Culture

By Jeannette Lasansky

Oral Traditions Project

Inspired by Eliott Wigginton's Foxfire Project in Rabun Gap, Georgia, the Oral Traditions Project started in 1973 as part of Union County, Pennsylvania's celebration of the United States bicentennial.¹ In 1977, along with other longtime projects of the Union County Bicentennial Commission, Oral Traditions became incorporated into the activities of the county's historical society.

Initially, the project had focused solely on tape recording skills and attitudes passed down orally—often, but not exclusively, craft traditions. It soon became apparent that the recorded voice and its transcribed text were only part of the resources that needed to be gathered. Objects and their contextual settings, such as a basketmaker's shop and tools, articles of manufacture as well as traditional processes, needed to be visually recorded through photographs. These visuals were then combined with segments from oral interviews, local fiddle music, and interpretive commentary into synchronized multimedia shows. Audiences, which included informants and their friends and families, others long mindful of these skills but not always appreciative of them, and newcomers to the community, were excited by these presentations. By 1976 the Oral Traditions Project was presenting workshops, lectures, demonstrations, and concerts.

The Oral Traditions Project mounted its first major exhibition, on nineteenth-century iron, tin, brass, copper, and pewter ware, at Bucknell University in February 1976.² After its close, those involved realized that only posters, newspaper clippings, some on-site photography, and memories remained. They also knew that a relatively small group of people had been impacted: those at the opening, school children who came on tours and for demonstrations, others who had heard of the effort, and the casual visitor. Even this first show contained considerable new information based on interviews and never before exhibited objects, manuscripts, and period photographs. The staff of the project decided such efforts should, when possible, also result in a publication that could reach a much larger audience and for a much longer period of time.

The series of books on Pennsylvania material culture researched, produced, and published by the Oral Traditions Project is the result of that decision. Even though they often accompanied an exhibition,³ the books have never been
intended as show catalogs, which were felt to have a more limited life and intellectual scope, but rather as monographs on Pennsylvania material culture. Subject matter evolved as one project opened up new possibilities for another. For instance, researching marked and unmarked pottery led us to want to know more about anonymous craftspersons like basketmakers. Frustrated at not finding women playing a significant role in the first traditions we documented, we deliberately focused on the homemaker's productions during the holidays in Nada Gray's *Holidays/Victorian Women Celebrate in Pennsylvania* (1983). Also suspecting that some of the region's quilt traditions have been obscured by myth and misunderstanding—such as the presumed importance of the use of scraps, the perception of Pennsylvania German quilters as more significant than the earlier Anglo-American practitioners, and the emphasis placed on design over
needlework traditions—the project undertook two major quilt documentation efforts from 1984 to 1987. In 1993, as the Oral Traditions Project plans to publish its fifteenth book on historic and contemporary craft traditions in Pennsylvania, it is appropriate to pause and reflect upon how well and often the researchers and authors have been able to incorporate significantly new oral history/oral traditions material into the publication series.

The extent to which the books have used oral materials has varied greatly. In some, like *A Good Start: The Aussteier or Dowry* (1990), *Buggy Town: An Era in American Transportation* (1984), and *Willow, Oak, and Rye: Basket Traditions in Pennsylvania* (1978), the oral material has played a critical role, while in others, like *Country Cloth to Coverlets* (1981) and *Central Pennsylvania Redware Pottery, 1780-1904* (1979), it has been more marginal. *Made of Mud: Stoneware Potteries in Central Pennsylvania, 1831-1925* (1977) turned out to have no living subject at all—even the young boys who hauled the clay were all dead. Here then the oral history/tradition component was nonexistent.

The relative importance of oral sources for each research effort has never been for lack of trying to use the methodology, but rather the extent to which it is able to yield certain information. The project’s overall premise has been not to strain this resource or to scuttle a research effort if interviews were not producing significant results. Rather, projects were chosen based on how our desire to understand more about a particular aspect of Pennsylvanians’ lives merged with the interests of our volunteers. However, if there is one of our publications that might serve as a model of the equal importance of written and oral sources, it is the book on dowry practices in Pennsylvania, *A Good Start.*

The project was a logical outgrowth of our previous work, since marriage portions contained many objects made in the craft traditions Oral Traditions had been researching for over a decade. The dowry or *aussteier* put objects and their receipt within complex and evolving family and community traditions. Our research began by locating and analyzing manuscripts, both privately and publicly held, that might yield pertinent information: dozens of family and craftsman account books from 1749 to 1945, hundreds of wills, inventories, diaries, and letters, as well as objects with dowry associations woven, punched, or carved into them or sewn, drawn, or written on them. We also read what others had said about the legal aspects of dowry as well as its economic, social, and cultural significance. Finally, after we had explored all those avenues, we concentrated on doing in-depth interviews with the largest single group of people in Pennsylvania still
adhering to complex dowry traditions for their children: members of conservative plain sects—the Amish and some Mennonites.

Imagine our excitement at learning through our oral history interviews that the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century patterns of giving, documented in family account books and wills of that period, were still being practiced among the most conservative of Pennsylvania’s plain sects—the Nebraska Amish of Brush Valley in Centre County, Big Valley in Mifflin County, and Dry Valley in Union County. To be able to hear the details of their male and female “good starts” was an oral historian’s dream realized. Similar but updated practices of the late-nineteenth century were common with their more progressive neighbors, the Lancaster Amish.

Broad cultural attitudes emerged from a cumulative body of individual stories from over two dozen informants in four counties. As Sadie Beiler, an older Amish grandmother living in Lancaster County, said, “There are no rules but everybody
was guided by tradition.” She felt certain patterns evolved within the group. Parents never worried about what their neighbors gave their children because everybody had different financial means. It was just “everybody will stretch [na de deck schtrecker]” to do the best they can. But, she observed, young people often compare what each “gets from home.”

Through using oral histories, we were not only better able to understand early manuscript sources and references, but we were also able to record late twentieth-century practices. They, too, were placed in perspective. We could see patterns of inheritance and attitudes, of the retention, evolution, and abandonment of cultural practices over time, as well as the introduction of new forms. For example, because of financial constraints, male dowry today is less practiced. Now it is often restricted to expensive items like a horse and buggy or possibly help in purchasing a farm. Some farm tools might still be included though fewer than in the past, but the male will often still get his desk and a quilt or two, a bed, and rolled rags for the parlor carpet if his family is very tradition bound.

Any publication is richer for delving more deeply and in as many directions as possible. It is our hope that our series has inspired others to pursue all these avenues, just as the Oral Traditions Project was helped by the earlier and continuing work of others like Alan G. Keyser, Ellen J. Gehret, and Nancy Road. Some subjects will yield a very full range of sources, and only the limits of time, energy, and imagination set the parameters. The opportunities for publishing such oral tradition/oral history research projects are excellent, for a solid case has been argued for their relevance for nearly a half century, not only in the field of material culture but also within history and folklore. As we have learned, an appreciative audience is there as well.

Notes
2. Each subsequent exhibition—on salt fired stoneware and red earthenware pottery, basketmaking, weaving, blacksmithing, holiday traditions, tinsmithing, quiltmaking, and the preparation and presentation of the dowry—has been the result of a one- to two-year intense research effort carried on by a group of upwards to fifteen professional volunteers and usually funded in part by the National Endowment for the Arts or the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.
3. The weaving project, Sandra Rambo Walker's *From Country Cloth to Coverlets* (Lewisburg, Penn.: Oral Traditions Project, 1981), was one in which institutions in all eight counties in the project’s scope were encouraged to develop an exhibit or two. Depending on each site’s resources, shows were held for one day, a week, or several months. The Oral Traditions Project sent the forthcoming book’s pertinent chapters in prepublication form to site and museum directors in advance of the exhibit. In this way, exhibitions could be based on the most recent findings. Oral Traditions also published a flyer with information on all the shows. A similar approach was subsequently adopted for the holidays and dowry projects.

4. The quilt documentation projects were followed by major exhibitions, publications, and textile symposia, including publication of symposia papers. The Oral Traditions Project envisions expanding its symposia offerings to include a program on painted surfaces in 1995 and another on scratched, cut, and pierced traditions in 1997.


6. The series of books researched and published by the German Folk Culture Museum in Walnut Creek, Ohio, is based upon the Oral Traditions model, as is the format of From Pennsylvania to Waterloo: Pennsylvania-German Folk Culture in Transition by Susan M. Burke et al. (Kitchener, Ont.: Friends of the Joseph Schneider Haus, 1991). A review in *Antique Review* of December 1991, noted that the Ohio Quilt Project’s statewide survey, Quilts in Community: Ohio’s Traditions by Ricky Clark, George W. Knepper, and Ellice Ronsheim (Nashville, Tenn.: Rutledge Hill Press, 1991), “is similar to the Oral Traditions project publications in depth and scope of research and range of topics.”

7. These three members of the Goschenhoppen Historians, located in Green Lane, Pennsylvania, have written numerous articles and books based on a mix of in-depth oral history interviews with carefully selected informants and extensive research in varied manuscript sources including account books, recipe books, ledgers, wills, inventories, vendues, deeds, maps, diaries, letters, newspapers, and periodicals. Their published work includes Keyser’s “Beds, Bedding, Bedsteads and Sleep,” *Der Reggaboge*, *The Quarterly of the Pennsylvania German Society* (October 1978): pp. 1-28, reprinted in Jeannette Lasansky, ed., *Pieced By Mother: Symposium Papers* (Lewisburg, Penn.: Oral Traditions Project, 1988); Keyser and Gehret’s *The Homespun Textile Traditions of the Pennsylvania Germans* (Harrisburg, Penn.: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1976); Gehret’s *Rural Pennsylvania Clothing* (York, Penn.: Liberty Cap Books, 1976), which has been made into two videos with the same title by Hellam Hills Productions, York, Penn. (1992); and *This Is the Way I Spend My Time* (Birdsboro, Penn.: Pennsylvania German Society, 1985); Gehret and Roan’s *Just a Quilt: Jutch en Deppich: A Folk Cultural Study and Source Book of Quilting Practices in and around the Goschenhoppen Region, 1840-1940* (Green Lane, Penn.: Goschenhoppen Historians, 1984); and Roan’s *Boyertown Cookery* (Boyertown, Penn.: Boyertown Area Historical Society, 1978); “Fabrics Used by Pennsylvania-German Farm Families in Southeastern Pennsylvania,” in Jeannette Lasansky, ed. *Bits and Pieces: Textile Traditions* (Lewisburg, Penn.: Oral Traditions Project, 1991), pp. 16-25; and “Mennonite Foodways in Pennsylvania,” in Burke et al., *From Pennsylvania to Waterloo*.

8. The Oral Traditions Project’s affiliation with university presses (Pennsylvania State University Press then the University of Pennsylvania Press) has allowed its books to remain in print much longer than would have otherwise been possible for an organization of its small size and resources. The project maintains total control over the scope, research, writing, and execution of its books while the presses act as distributors.