Oral History and Industrial Heritage Museums

James B. Lane

Plans for industrial heritage museums are proliferating all over the country from Birmingham, Alabama, to Butte, Montana, but especially in the rust belt regions of the Midwest and Northeast. As communities undergo the pangs of deindustrialization, the concept of the industrial heritage museum appeals to economic planners and cultural preservationists alike. Hamish Maxwell of the Philip Morris corporation asserted that business also has a stake in such institutions because they foster pluralism, "attract tourism dollars and contribute to urban renewal." In northwest Indiana, both East Chicago (once the self-proclaimed "most industrial of industrial cities") and Gary (its economically ravaged neighbor) have explored the concept of constructing museums of the steel industry.[1]

Such institutions might prove to enjoy a longer run than the operating mills themselves. Perry K. Blatz has written,

> Individuals and groups will have to continue to craft their own strategies day by day and place by place, to cushion the shocks of economic change. As so many oral historians have shown, these strategies, based on ties of family, ethnicity, religion, union, and community, have, on occasion, proved stronger than the relentlessly wasteful illogic of the market place.[2]

Michael Frisch has warned that "history as a tool of civic revitalization is not history in necessarily reliable hands." If Clio is to be enlisted in civic improvement projects, however, most public historians agree that heritage museums are preferred over grandiose theme parks such as Steamtown, the multimillion-dollar pork barrel project launched to reinvigorate greater Scranton, Pennsylvania, or Six Flags Auto

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[1] Harry Butowsky telephone interview by James B. Lane, Jan. 4, 1993, notes in industrial heritage museums file, James B. Lane Papers (Calumet Regional Archives, Gary, Ind.). See also Martin Blatt, "The National Park Service and Labor History," paper presented at the 1992 meeting of the National Council on Public History, 3 (in James B. Lane's possession). Hamish Maxwell is quoted in *Museums for a New Century: A Report of the Commission on Museums* (Washington, 1984), 9. On northwest Indiana, see Elaine Castellanos to Steve McShane, Sept. 29, 1992, industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers; and Charles Allen interview by Lane, Feb. 17, 1988, transcript, *ibid.*

[2] Perry K. Blatz, "The Fate of Steel and Its Communities," *Oral History Review,* 17 (Fall 1989), 122.

World, the $70 million white elephant that opened and closed during the 1980s in Flint, Michigan, and that was satirized in the film *Roger and Me.*[3]

Why should historians of the United States be especially interested in industrial heritage museums? Clearly the missions of such museums—documentation, interpretation, and presentation—are analogous to the research, teaching, and service components of academia. Historians can combine professional and community service through a mutually beneficial association with such institutions, perhaps as a result of grants to generate oral history fieldwork, which might culminate in exhibitions seen by thousands of visitors. Historians also can help teach about the past to large numbers of people by suggesting critical, analytical, and comparative frameworks for presentational works. Finally, industrial heritage museums are promising environments for social and institutional historians conducting case studies. A generation ago, many scholars within the profession contemptuously referred to the contents of social history as "pots and pans" and disparaged local history as the preserve of genealogists and antiquarians. Institutional studies were considered boring exercises in commemorative boosterism, and oral interview techniques were seen as less valid than written documentation.

Now all that has changed. In *Nearby History,* David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty employed English historian H. P. R. Finberg's image of the world as a series of concentric circles, starting with the family and the close-at-hand community and extending out to the national state and the supranational society. Wrote Finberg: "Each requires to be studied with constant reference to the one outside it; but the inner rings are not the less perfect circles for being wholly surrounded and enclosed by the outer." A growing number of historians are finding industrial heritage museums to be excellent venues for the work of the inner rings.[4]

In line with historical studies in general, industrial heritage museums are changing their nature, scope, and points of emphasis. Hundreds of history and science museums touch upon the subject of industrialization, but heritage museums are devoted primarily to the past and usually trace the development of a single industry. In contrast to museums of science and industry, which have traditionally solicited corporate exhibitions focusing on machines and on technological change, industrial heritage museums emphasize people and evolving subcultures, often in relation to a single industry in a given locale. In other words, they not only tell stories about how the United States became an industrial (and then a postindustrial) nation but also examine the human consequences of these phenomena.

An earlier style of company museum proliferated in the twentieth century, beginning in 1901 with the United Shoe Machinery Company museum in Boston. Herbert Katz and Marjorie Katz wrote in 1965 that company museums can be found "in virtually every field, from drugs and dinnerware through fur and furnishings

[3] Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany, 1990), 257; Blatt, "National Park Service and Labor History," 3; Victor J. Danilov, *America's Science Museums* (Westport, 1990), 23.

[4] David E. Kyvig and Myron A. Marty, *Nearby History: Exploring the Past around You* (Nashville, 1982), 6.

to trains and telephones." Victor S. Danilov's 1990 list of eighteen industrial heritage museums is dominated by cultural institutions focusing on pre-twentieth-century developments such as the Saugus Iron Works National Historic Site in Saugus, Massachusetts, and the Slater Mill Historic Site in Pawtucket, Rhode Island.[5] Industrial heritage museums have undergone dramatic changes since 1976. Public historian Mike Wallace cited the Botto House in Paterson, New Jersey, and the Discovery Hall Museum in South Bend, Indiana, as examples of those changes: "The focus of attention has shifted from industrial objects, processes, and entrepreneurs to the universe of the working class: its experience, its culture and cultural creativity, its forms of economic and, to a lesser degree, political organization."[6]

If the primary purpose of industrial heritage museums is to uncover the human dimensions of an industrial milieu as it changed over time, oral history is an essential component. It may soon be too late to find informants who recall the non-union era of an industry or even its labor-intensive heyday. If, as Nancy Tomes has written, "the chief value of oral history interviews lies in their record of perception and memory, not of specific fact or event," then a wide range of attitudinal studies are possible—about such matters as safety conditions and ecological standards, labor organizing and union-management relations, workplace folktales and corporate customs, and the bureaucratization process in both unions and businesses. Not only do employees and employers need to be interviewed; competitors, customers, and critics do as well.[7]

As scholars get more involved in industrial heritage museums, opportunities for oral interviewing will enhance both their own research and the institution's pool of resources. An ongoing, fully staffed oral history component will not only benefit the institution's presentational mission but also serve a broader historical research function. Interview-format video displays have become a well-accepted, almost indispensable component of museum exhibits. And why not? Rudolph J. Vecoli has written, "Artifacts do not speak for themselves. . . . To have oral histories about the machinery, the foremen, and the relationship with other workers would greatly enrich the interpretation of the technology as well as the work experience."[8]

In approaching the design of an oral history component to an industrial heritage museum, a number of issues and dilemmas present themselves; they range from academic freedom to matters of professionalism, and they can be highlighted by looking at some specific projects. Until recently virtually no industrial heritage museum had an ongoing oral history program with professionally trained, full-time staff members conducting interviews and then indexing and transcribing them.

[5] Herbert Katz and Marjorie Katz, *Museums, U.S.A.: A History and Guide* (New York, 1965), 23; Danilov, *America's Science Museums.*

[6] Mike Wallace, "Industrial Museums and the History of Deindustrialization," *Public Historian,* 9 (Winter 1987), 9.

[7] Nancy Tomes, "Oral History in the History of Medicine," *Journal of American History,* 78 (Sept. 1991), 610; Carl Ryant, "Oral History and Business History," *Journal of American History,* 75 (Sept. 1988), 560.

[8] Rudolph J. Vecoli to Lane, Dec. 9, 1992, industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers; Jo Blatti, "Public History and Oral History," *Journal of American History,* 77 (Sept. 1990), 615.

Typical of responses I received from asking industrial museum directors about their oral history programs was a letter dated Dec. 3, 1992, from Matt Mayberry of the Western Museum of Mining and Industry (founded in 1970) in Colorado Springs, Colorado; he reported that their first oral history was to have been conducted over the Thanksgiving holiday by a volunteer (the subject's daughter) in southern California.[9]

Allen Smith's *Directory of Oral History Collections* lists only three industrial heritage institutions: Dupont's Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware, the Edison Institute of the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Complex in Dearborn, Michigan, and the Arkansas Oil and Brine Museum in Smackover. (Other interesting collections can be found at the Drake Oil Well Museum in Titusville, Pennsylvania, and the Iron County Museum in Caspian, Michigan.)[10] The preponderance of Smith's industrial heritage–related listings are university archives, with a smattering of public libraries, historical societies, and corporate archives. In university collections in Pennsylvania, for example, are the Archives of Industrial Society at the University of Pittsburgh, the Labor Studies Oral History Project at Pennsylvania State University at University Park, and the Center for the Study of Mining Culture, Literature, and Lore at Penn State's Uniontown campus, among others. Some corporate archives have been bequeathed to such institutions as the Studebaker National Museum in South Bend, Indiana.[11]

During the past three decades, councils for the humanities and social sciences have brought oral historians, archivists, and museum curators together by commonly requiring that proposals for grant-funded projects have a public programming component, input from academicians, and a designated research repository. One such project, called "Shifting Gears," was funded by the Massachusetts Foundation for Humanities and Public Policy in conjunction with the Heritage State Park system; the project conducted interviews with textile workers in such New England cities as Fall River, Gardner, Holyoke, Lawrence, and North Adams. Following in the footsteps of *Amoskeag,* Tamara Hareven and Randolph Langenbach's study of the textile industry in Manchester, New Hampshire, the "Shifting Gears" project was also similar to several studies of Lowell, Massachusetts, that analyzed the interaction between work and family life.[12]

[9] Matt Mayberry to Lane, Dec. 3, 1992, industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers.

[10] Allen Smith, *Directory of Oral History Collections* (Phoenix, 1988), 15, 50, 3. Marcia Bernhardt to Lane, Dec. 24, 1992, industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers. See also Alan M. Meckler and Ruth McMullin, eds., *Oral History Collections* (New York, 1975); and Patsy A. Cook, ed., *Directory of Oral History Programs in the United States* (Sanford, N.C., 1982).

[11] On the wide variety of corporate archives, see Philip F. Mooney, "The Practice of History in Corporate America: Business Archives in the United States," in *Public History: An Introduction,* ed. Barbara J. Howe and Emory L. Kemp (Malabar, Fla., 1986), 427–39. Jeanne Denham to Lane, Dec. 11, 1992, industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers.

[12] Eartha Dengler telephone interview by Lane, Nov. 12, 1992, notes in industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers; Martha Mayo telephone interview by Lane, Nov. 12, 1992, notes *ibid.*; Mayo telephone interview by Lane, March 16, 1993, notes *ibid.* (Dengler is with the Immigrant City Archives in Lawrence, Massachusetts, Mayo with the Center for Lowell History, Lowell Massachusetts.) Tamara Hareven and Randolph Langenbach, *Amoskeag: Life and Work in an American Factory City* (New York, 1978).

The most extensive of these studies was carried out between 1984 and 1986 by University of Lowell researchers under contract with the Lowell National Historical Park, which was designed as an urban cultural center whose theme would be the industrial revolution. The researchers compiled over a hundred transcribed interviews intended for eventual use in Boott Cotton Mills, the park's industrial heritage museum, which opened in 1992. The permanent exhibition concentrated more on the production process, especially during the nineteenth century, than on the continuities between life at work and in the family and community. At first uncertain how to employ the audiotapes, the park service eventually invited back some of the informants, and a production team videotaped them in preparation for four programs to be played on monitors within the permanent exhibition. Under the general title "The Workers Remember," the videotapes dealt with "Going to Work," "Life in the Mills," "Survival and Conflict / Workers and Bosses," and "The Closing of the Mills." By and large, they are somber in mood rather than nostalgic. The opening lines of "Going to Work," spoken by twenty-nine-year veteran Sidney Mukovitz, are: "I hate this room. It reminds me of when I used to work in the mill and I worked, and I sweat, and it's dirty and it was miserable, and the pay was very small. I wouldn't want to have anybody working here, not even a dog."[13]

Disappointed that so little use was going to be made of the oral histories at Boott Cotton Mills, project co-director Mary H. Blewett published thirty-four of them in a book entitled *The Last Generation.* Blewett wrote, "The results of the interviews are strikingly articulate, as if each person has silently mulled over for years the good times and the bad within the family and at work. When asked to speak, they were ready."[14]

Historian Mike Wallace praised the Lowell museum's attention to labor and social history but wanted to know more about the workers' politics and and prejudices; he wondered whether "the old tyrannies of artifact and place may have been replaced by the new tyrannies of the shop floor and the boarding house." Unlike the National Park Service's ongoing operation at Ellis Island in New York, the only in-house program currently in place at Lowell's Boott Cotton Mills is the videotaping of an annual millworkers' reunion.[15]

An industrial heritage project with an ambitious, six-pronged oral history component has been launched by the federal government, in partnership with state agencies and local institutions, in the nine counties of southwestern Pennsylvania known as the Allegheny Highlands. In response to a National Park Service study, Congress in 1989 set up a commission dedicated to preserving and interpreting the human dimensions of the industrial heritage within the region. Like that of the

[13] Martin Blatt telephone interview by Lane, Nov. 11, 1992, notes in industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers. Transcript of "The Workers Remember" in Martin Blatt to Lane, Nov. 17, 1992, *ibid.* See also John Engstrom, "Museum Brings Mill Back to Life," *Boston Globe,* Aug. 20, 1992, Calendar sec., p. 12; and Allen Freeman, "Lessons from Lowell," *Historic Preservation,* 42 (Nov./Dec. 1990), 32–39, 68–69.

[14] Mary H. Blewett, *The Last Generation: Work and Life in the Textile Mills of Lowell, Massachusetts, 1910–1960* (Amherst, 1990), xvi.

[15] Wallace, "Industrial Museums," 12. See Blatt, "National Park Service and Oral History," 1–5.

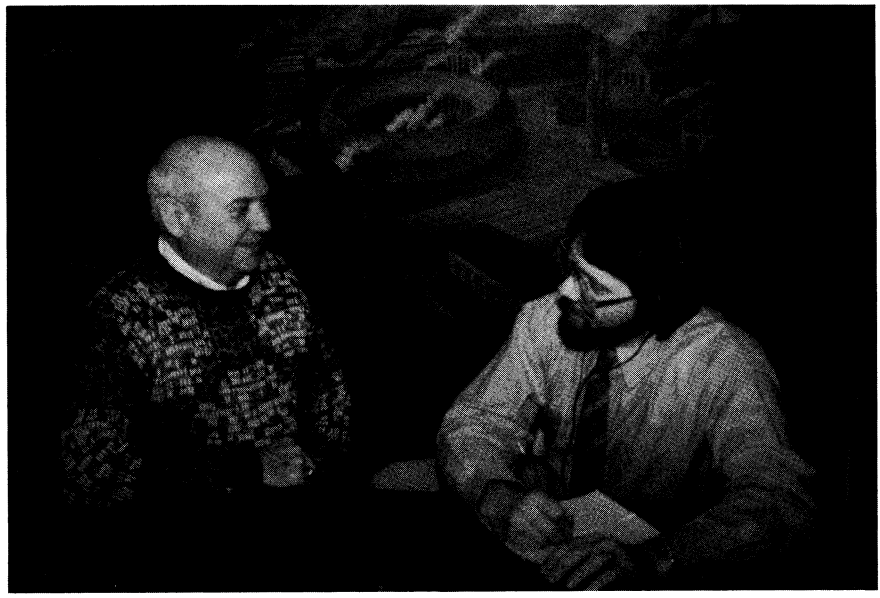
Lowell project, the purpose of America's Industrial Heritage Project was twofold: to commemorate fast-vanishing subcultures and to generate tourism dollars. As part of the broader work plan, oral history folklife centers were set up at six locations (Altoona, Fayette, Greensburg, Indiana, Johnstown, and Somerset) to deal with railroading, coke, gender studies, coal, steel, and agriculture. The Folklife Division was given the rather vague mission to "document occupational, ethnic, and gender-based experience" and to "establish local, national and international contacts with working people and heritage professionals who are striving to comprehend the relationship between deindustrialization and the politics of culture." This statement was broad enough to allow for a wide variety of investigations, on topics ranging from acculturization, urbanization, and pluralism to race, class, and gender; the whole project has been described as "so massive that even those of us within are sometimes left scratching our heads."[16]

The various documentation centers have worked especially well in areas where there already was an ongoing program, such as at the coal mining archives of Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Jim Dougherty's film "The Struggle for an American Way of Life: Coal Miners and Operators in Central Pennsylvania, 1919–1933" includes oral testimony about murderous working conditions and about intimidation of labor organizers by the Ku Klux Klan. At the Railroaders Memorial Museum in Altoona, Pennsylvania, approximately 150 audiotapes became the research base and 40 videotapes the raw footage for a documentary entitled "Working the Mountain: Workers of the Horseshoe Curve," which deals with maintaining the right-of-way for trains passing over the Allegheny Mountains. Conveying a sense of the romantic aura of railroading during the era of steam-powered trains, engineers and trackmen reminisce about riding and maintaining the rails: spreading ballast, checking joints, putting in ties by hand, and coping with switches during snowstorms. Over twenty thousand visitors have seen the documentary within the past year, and a hundred teachers and others have taken an oral history workshop. Cummins McNitt, coordinator of the Altoona Folklife Documentation Center of Transportation, has been doing fieldwork into such topics as ethnicity, recreation, family life, and train wrecks.[17]

Another museum of recent vintage with an ongoing oral history component but only a single location is the Youngstown Historical Center of Industry and Labor. Operating under the auspices of the state-funded Ohio Historical Society, the center is dedicated to preserving, in the words of one of its brochures, "the industrial heritage of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley." Rather than serving as a mere appendage to the museum's public programming needs, the oral history program is regarded as a primary source repository. The center's three full-time staff members

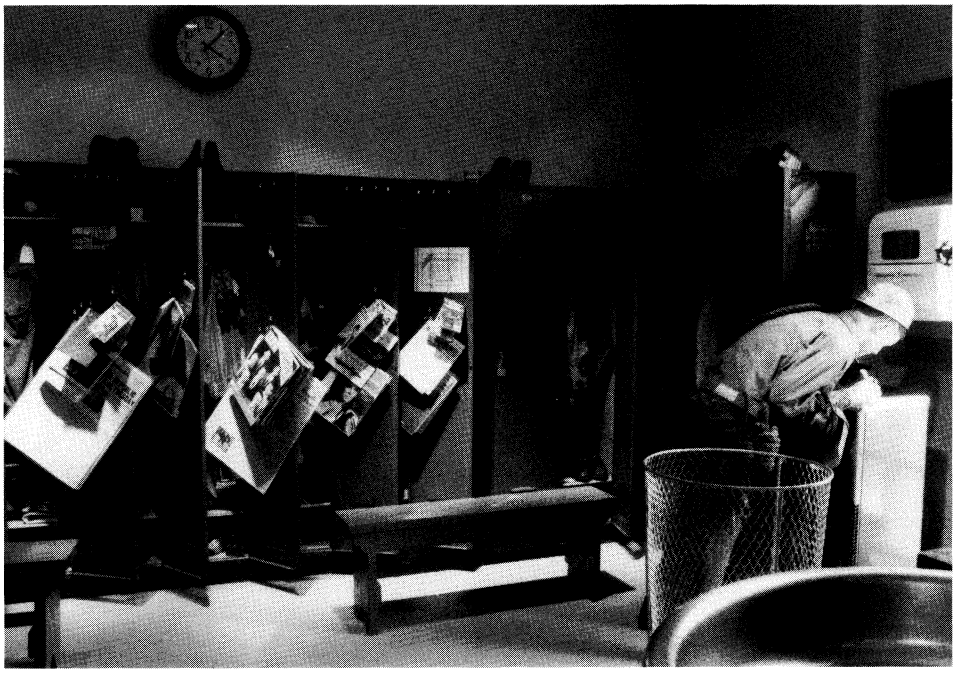
[16] "America's Industrial Heritage Project," undated brochure (in Lane's possession); "Folklife Division Description," undated memo (in Lane's possession). Cummins McNitt interview by Lane, Nov. 5, 1992, notes in industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers; McNitt interview by Lane, March 16, 1993, notes *ibid.*; Jim Abrams interview by Lane, March 24, 1993, notes *ibid.* Quotation from McNitt to Lane, Nov. 5, 1992, *ibid.*

[17] McNitt and other coordinators of America's Industrial Heritage Project described some of their activities at the 1992 meeting of the Oral History Association in Cleveland.



Cummins McNitt interviewing William Haxel, a locomotive engineer, at the Railroaders Memorial Museum, Altoona, Pennsylvania, April 1993. Joe Servello's mural of the Altoona shops is in the background. *Courtesy Altoona Folklife Documentation Center of Transportation, America's Industrial Heritage Project & Railroaders Memorial Museum.*

include a curator, an archivist, and an oral historian, who by 1993 had amassed over fifty interviews (most of which had been indexed but not transcribed). Site manager Donna M. DeBlasio described those interviewed as a "mix of labor and management persons as well as some community leaders." One video available for viewing by visitors employs the reminiscences of those involved in unsuccessful efforts to reopen the mills as worker-owned facilities; among the leaders was Staughton Lynd, labor historian and Youngstown attorney. The center's permanent exhibition, "By the Sweat of Their Brow: Forging the Steel Valley," combines a day-in-the-life approach (replicating a locker room, a company-built house, and a blooming mill) with videotapes on such topics as labor, immigration, and urbanization. One forty-eight-minute program contains excerpts of conversations with five steelworkers, including an African American, a woman, and a member of management, on such subjects as getting work, the first day on the job, accidents, racial discrimination, and plant closings. Elma M. Jones Beatty recalled inspecting pipe during World War II in mills so noisy that communication had to be in sign language. Arlette Gatewood, the African American, said there once were Irish jobs, Welsh jobs, Italian jobs, Serbian and Polish jobs, and black men's jobs. "Seemingly the blacks always got the dirty jobs. We would be sent to the mason department or the open hearth or the blast furnace . . . or the labor gang. . . . Most crafts were lily white." The informants



Full-size replica of a steel mill locker room, Youngstown Historical Center of Industry & Labor. *Courtesy Ohio Historical Society.*

lamented the loss of decent-paying jobs more than the loss of the work environment itself. In this and the other tapes at the Youngstown Center, conflicts between labor and management have not been sanitized.[18]

Both the Youngstown Center and America's Industrial Heritage Project are serving as experimental models linking oral history and public history. The question remains: are heritage museums appropriate home bases for oral history programs? Skeptics could find cogent reasons to answer in the negative. Daniel J. Walkowitz argued that corporate sponsorship virtually assures the loss of critical perspective; similar statements could be made of government or other sponsorship. Sponsors do not care to be presented as villains and prefer to be shown in a good light. Projects often have nebulous guidelines; they may be pork barrel projects to stimulate the local economy, or they may arise in response to the clout of pressure groups such as organized labor; they may be subject to scrutiny from across the political spec-

[18] Donna M. DeBlasio to Lane, Nov. 19, 1992, industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers. Untitled videotape, 48 mins., prod. by Image Producers, Inc. (Ohio Historical Society, Oral History). David T. Wilson telephone interview by Lane, Nov. 16, 1992, notes in industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers. See Staughton Lynd, "The Genesis of the Idea of a Community Right to Industrial Property in Youngstown and Pittsburgh, 1977–1987," *Journal of American History,* 74 (Dec. 1987), 926–58.

trum. There is a good case to be made for limiting the role of government to the funding of oral history projects emanating from university researchers and local groups. Nonetheless, most academicians I have talked to envision no inherent problems with launching on-site oral history programs at museums so long as the projects are done critically and honestly. In the words of Hugh G. Earnhart of Youngstown State University, "There is enough work for all good oral historians," but, he warned, "It is *easy* to do bad oral history—and it takes skill and work to do *good* oral history."[19]

When the oral history program is part of a governmental institution, informants understandably might be reluctant to discuss sensitive matters such as on-the-job drug use, alcohol consumption, or sex. In matters political, former workers might be hesitant to criticize their old union or comment on the existence of Communists within its ranks or, at the other extreme, possible connections to organized crime. Likewise, former employers might decline to admit any evidence of corporate venality, inefficiency, noncompliance with environmental standards, or other illegalities.[20] Candor is integral to good oral history, as grudges, resentments, feuds, and other controversies are often the most telling part of the narratives. They may be replete with salty language, sexist and racist comments, and confidential information meant to be off the record. Therefore, for the protection of informants, there need to be clear guidelines in regard to what is open to the public.

"In using oral history in exhibitions," Brenda Factor has written, "it is critical to analyze the political implications, and to be quite clear about the fact that nothing, even the most neutral of exhibitions, can be politically neutral." Reviewing several industrial history exhibits, Lizabeth Cohen noted the tendencies to shy away from direct criticisms of the policies of corporate capitalism and to romanticize the self-contained communities of ethnic workers rather than to offer "a balanced treatment of laborers' multi-faceted relationship toward their work, their peers and their employers." Since museums are usually dependent on corporate sponsorship and/or governmental scrutiny, as well as popular support, curators may be reluctant to risk possible confrontations with various constituencies.[21]

Most exhibition goers expect exhibitions to be celebratory. An example of a non-celebratory exhibition that caused great consternation is "The West As America," which opened in 1991 at the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. It created a furor by portraying industrialization as exploitative and ecologically unsound. Former Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin called the exhibition

[19] Daniel J. Walkowitz, "Corporate History, or Giving History the Business," in *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public,* ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier, and Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia, 1986), 225–36. Hugh G. Earnhart to Lane, Dec. 10, 1992, industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers.

[20] James West Davidson and Mark Hamilton Lytle, *After the Fact: The Art of Historical Detection* (New York, 1982), 148–77.

[21] Brenda Factor, "Making an Exhibition of Yourself: Museums and Oral History," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal,* 13 (1991), 47. Lizabeth Cohen, "What Kind of World Have We Lost? Workers' Lives and Deindustrialization in the Museum," *American Quarterly,* 41 (Dec. 1989), 671.

"perverse," and Alaska senator Ted Stevens threatened to cut the Smithsonian's budget.[22]

Despite popular expectations, the celebratory impulse needs to be held in check, especially the tendency toward heroic periodization and self-congratulation in the use of such words as "rise," "decline," and "rebirth" (the latter often in conjunction with such gentrification projects as the museum itself). Mike Wallace wrote, "We need to stress that our museums treat moments in larger processes, processes which are still in operation. Exhibits should be analogous not to snapshots, but to frames from an ongoing movie." He objected to the very word "deindustrialization," preferring "capital flight" as a more apt conceptualization of "how corporations have sidestepped organized labor, and pressures to pay their share of social costs, by moving to more quiescent pastures," first to the South and then abroad.[23]

Ideally, industrial heritage museums will have enough resources to bring in scholars-in-residence or entire research teams to investigate original hypotheses. One model would be Richard M. Dorson's folklore team, whose pathbreaking study of northwest Indiana steelworkers and their environs led to new ways of looking at urban folklore.[24] It might also be beneficial to bring in distinguished scholars in fields related to the history of American industry who have not previously worked extensively with oral interviewing.

Oral historians could explore common concerns with journalists and learn from telecommunications experts how better to use the print media, radio, television, and computer graphics to disseminate the museum's resources.[25] Other fruitful collaborations might be free-lance writers, poets, and film directors; the contribution of film directors might include imploring oral historians to master the art of nodding silently. Curator Pete Daniel of the National Museum of American History has written that interviewing for media use "is quite different from our usual chatty style. . . . This means that one has to use eye contact, nods, hand motions, but not the mouth in guiding the person and showing enthusiasm."[26] This process of intellectual cross-fertilization could be enhanced by personal exchanges among institutions. By attending one another's professional conferences and through on-site exchanges, curators, archivists, and oral historians might gain a better understanding and appreciation of one another's goals, methods, and ethical canons.[27]

Off-site oral history projects might be beneficial for comparing a local industry with counterparts elsewhere in the United States and abroad. Such projects could also shed light on the national and multinational nature of union and corporate

[22] *Washington Post,* June 2, 1991, sec. 6, pp. 1, 5. See also Andrew Gulliford, review of "The West As America," *Journal of American History,* 79 (June 1992), 199–208.

[23] Wallace, "Industrial Museums," 9–19, esp. 10.

[24] See Richard Mercer Dorson, *Land of the Millrats: Urban Folklore in Indiana's Calumet Region* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981).

[25] Steven Horowitz, "Crimes in Search of Evidence: Journalists' Use of Oral History," *Oral History Review,* 17 (Fall 1989), 125–29.

[26] Pete Daniel to Lane, Dec. 2, 1992, industrial heritage museums file, Lane Papers.

[27] Bruce Stave telephone interview by Lane, Dec. 15, 1992, notes *ibid.*

decision making. These projects might be the outgrowth of personnel exchanges between industrial heritage museums and similar institutions abroad. (Mike Wallace has suggested establishing sister museums linking areas victimized by capitalist flight with new industrial frontiers such as Taiwan, South Korea, and the Dominican Republic.) American oral historians could learn much from the European oral history tradition, which is more oriented toward theory and ideology, or from that of Australia, which has tended to be iconoclastic and anti-establishment.[28] In Great Britain, local librarians and preventive medicine devotees have used oral history as a form of mental health therapy among senior citizens.[29]

While there will be periodic "emergency" needs for museum-based oral historians to interview local residents who are in failing health or about to move away, most of the actual taping might be left to others, with the primary role of the oral historian being administrative: providing training, technical aid, and advice to recruits from the ranks of local schools, churches, union halls, senior citizens centers, and other private organizations and societies. These volunteers would be encouraged to join regional oral history associations and attend professional conferences where they could participate in workshops and other relevant sessions. As Michael Frisch has written, it is time for academicians to relinquish their interpretative monopoly and start "sharing this authority with the relevant publics."[30]

Museum-based oral history directors may wish to work up full life histories on all those people who are featured in special projects or who have donated documents or exhibit items. In theory it might be laudable to collect the reminiscences of all articulate workers and management personnel (and other industrial region residents, too, for that matter). There may even be some content-analysis benefit in obtaining a hundred explanations of how steelworkers tapped a heat or hazed a rookie.[31] Better resource management, however, lies in thinking through how oral histories might be used rather than simply accumulating them for their own sake. Good oral history, it is well to remember, avoids the two extremes of being unfocused (and therefore without clear interview objectives) or too narrowly focused (and thus unopen to revelatory but seemingly parenthetical remarks).

As a believer in history from the bottom up, I welcome the launching of ongoing oral history programs as a worthwhile experiment, not only in the collecting of source materials but in broadening their dissemination. May these programs be carried out in the same humanistic spirit as the Federal Writers Project of the 1930s, when Studs Terkel, Ralph Ellison, Nelson Algren, and other government-supported interviewers took advantage of the liberating and radical potential of oral history,

[28] Wallace, "Industrial Museums," 17; Luisa Passerini, "Oral History in Italy, after the Second World War: From Populism to Subjectivity," *International Journal of Oral History,* 9 (June 1988), 114–24; Barry Down, "Oral History, Critical Theory, and Politics: Rethinking First Impressions," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal,* 12 (1990), 76.

[29] See Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (New York, 1978).

[30] Frisch, *Shared Authority,* 190; Gabrielle Morris, "The Interviewer as Tyrant," *International Journal of Oral History,* 9 (Feb. 1988), 234–35.

[31] See *Steel Shavings: Calumet Region Steelworkers Tales,* 17 (1990).

not just in terms of "adding to" the historical picture but in enabling peoples previously considered inarticulate to share in the fashioning of that portrait. For historians interested in these venues, there are ample resources waiting to be recorded and plentiful complex issues awaiting debate and resolution.[32]

[32] Donald A. Ritchie, "Oral History in the Federal Government," *Journal of American History*, 74 (Sept. 1987), 589. Most practitioners of the new social history have eschewed what Marc Bloch has labeled the "document fetish." See James B. Gardner and George Rollie Adams, eds., *Ordinary People and Everyday Life: Perspectives on the New Social History* (Nashville, 1983).