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The Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History

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RESEARCH NOTE

THE NORTHEAST ARCHIVES OF
FOLKLORE AND ORAL HISTORY

The Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History, a part of the Anthropology Department at the University of Maine at Orono, is a unique research and repository facility in that its collections document the lives of common men and women — mill workers, homemakers, woodsmen, river drivers, fishermen, and farmers — in the Maine, New England, and Maritime regions.

My experience with the Northeast Archives began in the fall of 1981 when I walked into the office to talk with Director Sandy Ives about using oral history techniques to learn more about the lives of Maine women during the Great Depression and World War II. I had already gathered a good deal of information from traditional written sources such as local, state, and federal government records; agricultural, industrial, and labor statistics; the organizational papers of various women's voluntary and professional groups; newspapers; and contemporary literature. However, many questions remained. I still did not know how the Depression and the war affected women's daily lives and social relationships either in the home or in the work place, how they dealt with those changes, or how they felt about them. For answers to those kinds of questions, it was clear that I would have to talk with women who had actually lived and experienced the 1930s and 1940s.

After a brief tour of the archives and a quick review of their seven-step, self-paced interviewer training course (which is open to any interested researcher), most of my questions as to

where to begin, how to find women who would be willing to be interviewed, and how to conduct and preserve the interview so it would be useful to me and to other researchers were answered. I completed the course in four weeks and began to write letters and set up appointments following leads from my own research and suggestions from professors and friends. Then, using one of the techniques recommended in the Archives' training manual, *The Tape-Recorded Interview* (Edward D. Ives, 1974), I placed an article and photo in the local newspaper explaining my project and asking women who remembered the 1930s and 1940s to contact me.

Much to my amazement and delight, they did, by letter and telephone, in almost overwhelming numbers. In fact, the response was so great that I soon enlisted the help of the ten students in Professor Ives's Oral History Field Worker course who, among them, conducted forty-five interviews. At project's end, we had talked with over seventy women from many parts of the state and had collected over 150 photographs, as well as some interesting Depression and World War II memorabilia.

The Maine Women During the Great Depression and World War II Project is just one of the more recent examples of the many informative oral history projects conducted under the auspices of the Northeast Archives over the twenty-five years of its existence. Perhaps the two most extensive of these projects are the Lumberman's Life and the Lobsterman's Life projects, which emphasize every aspect of the daily lives and work of woodsmen and lobstermen, the former from 1880 to 1920 and the latter from the turn of the century to the present. Both involve over a hundred hours of taped interviews and many valuable photographs. Each project, large or small — indeed, each interview — gives a clearer picture of what it was or is like to be a working man or woman in the New England-Atlantic Province region.

At present the Archives houses over 1,800 accessions, about 3,000 hours of audio and video tape recordings, and over 6,000 photographs, all of which are available to any serious student or scholar, amateur and professional alike. Also, an extensive

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collection of folk song and instrumental music focuses on the local songs and songmakers in the Maine-Maritime area, and for "in-house" use, the Archives contains a collection of over 250 commercial recordings of various kinds of folk music with a recently created computer finding index.

Subject to certain restrictions and for a reasonable fee, the Archives offers a copying service for its tapes, transcripts, and photographs. Also available to school and community groups for a small rental fee are audio-visual materials on Maine folklore in the form of a half-hour slide/tape show entitled "Maine's Folklife," a black-and-white photo exhibit on "Maine Folklife, 1980," and a color photo exhibit devoted to the Maine lobster buoy in its various forms and habitats. The Archives staff is now preparing a catalog with subject index describing all of the Archives' holdings, including audio and video tapes, transcripts, manuscripts, photographs, and artifacts. For more information about the Northeast Archives, its holdings, and its services, please write to Director Edward D. Ives, Room B, South Stevens Hall, University of Maine, Orono, Maine 04469.

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