BRINGING ORAL HISTORY INTO MUSEUMS
Why and how?
General Thoughts and a Case Study

Gerald Zahavi, University at Albany, SUNY
Prof. of History and Director, Documentary Studies Program,
SUNY-Albany
(Also, Media Curator and Executive Board Member, Adirondack
History Museum, Elizabethtown, NY)
EMAIL: gzahavi@albany.edu
SOME QUESTIONS:
1) What will the oral/video histories add to the exhibit?
2) How long will museum audiences spend with each oral/video interview selection? How deeply do they listen?
   * How many selections?
   * How long should the selections be?
   * How many interviewees should be used?
3) How should we organize and present the interviews? -- by interviewee or by themes/topics?
4) What technology is best to use? What technical and practical challenges arise from specific delivery choices? How to we maximize listener comfort?
5) Should interviews used in an exhibit be selected on the basis of representativeness -- or on the basis of dramatic content and effective delivery?
ORAL HISTORY

PRESENTATION OPTIONS
There was always a dream at that time for us for everybody to go to the States. You have to remember, in those days we didn’t have the Internet, even the television wasn’t that common in India, people had television but not in all parts. In general communications were more limited… We never really had a visual, other than through watching movies… Today, you go on the computer and you log in and you can see everything live. It was totally different back then. I don’t know, maybe in a way that was good too because you never knew what to expect. When you came, and you landed, and you saw, it was completely flabbergasting because you’ve never seen something so different… The worst time was after I landed in New York. And it’s also jetlag, and the winter, and then the sudden realization; I am here, you know, now you know there is no going back, it’s a one-way ticket…

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People change, marriages fall apart. Apparently I have a history of liking men that are possessive and abusive. I stayed together with him for 20 years, because of the children. I left several times, but he would make life difficult, promise to change… And I’d rather regret trying than regret not trying. And then, once the kids were grown, it was just over. He didn’t like it, but that was it. … One of the highlights of my life was the day I stopped hating him. I just let it go. It might have been when I first got here. When it was kind of like: I don’t have to deal with any of this anymore. I don’t hate him any more, I don’t want contact with him, but the anger and the frustration and the hurt they just went away. Maybe it was just the move to here. Maybe it was the safety of being far away, so that I could just let it go.

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block quotes on the wall
Oral history exhibit at the Coconino Center for the Arts, Flagstaff
Deliver content via audio listening stations (handsets, speaker, sound cones)
Listening stations -- The Sound of Sax in The Museum of Making Music
Sound Dome/Cone Systems
Video monitor w/looping video clips (speakers, headphones)
touch-screen video monitors (speakers, headphones)
CASE STUDY:
Wilderness Rangers in New York State’s Adirondack Mountains: An Oral/Video History Project at the Adirondack History Museum, Elizabethtown, NY (Eastern Adirondacks)
Green - Forest Preserve Lands
Tan - Conservation Easement Lands
Gray - Private Lands
VIDEO: AERIAL TOUR OF THE HIGH PEAKS
(Produced by Rob Fischer
YouTube Access:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_lpjHoLoB34)
Full exhibit design – video interviews to be integrated into this permanent exhibit space.
Interview setup – I “double mic” my interviewees. The shotgun microphone is attached to a HD video camera; the other recording is a ZOOM H4n Pro.
Peter Fish served New York State as Forest Ranger from 1969 to 1998 in the Catskills and the Adirondack High Peaks regions. He was a frequent patroller of his district, which included Mt. Marcy (he recalls climbing Mt. Marcy 707 times). During his three-decade-long career, most of which was spent in the High Peaks region of the Adirondack Mountains, his duties included: search and rescue, law enforcement, education, trail maintenance, and environmental protection – especially of the delicate alpine High Peaks region. He was a much beloved hiker-focused ranger, viewing his central role as education. In a couple of cases where Fish’s judgment in search and rescue were challenged, he received massive support from hiking clubs and individuals from New York and adjacent states.

The disappearance of Steven Paul Thomas

Peter Fish, Forest Ranger, 1969-1998

Starting the job

What a gun is for . . .

Clever bears . . .

My trusty husky . . .
Pete Fish on the disappearance of Steven Paul Thomas in 1976

LINKED FROM PREVIOUS INTRODUCTORY PAGE TO PETE FISH – NOTE “BACK” ARROW
For 35 years, Gary Hodges roamed the woods and waters as a forest ranger for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. He was specially trained in rescue work and most of his years in service were spent in the High Peaks.

“Sometimes I preferred being in the woods alone . . .”

On wilderness. . .”

“You called all of the shots . . .”
Richard M. Olcott (95 years old when interviewed),
Forest Ranger, Hurricane Mountain Primitive Area (1958-1986)

Working on a fire tower

Fighting fires ~ 96 cents an hour

A frightened fire tower observer . . .
THE TOOLS OF THE TRADE: Gary Hodges “Always an axe on my pack”
Becoming a ranger: “there stated the career . . .”
Pete’s gun and a child’s question . . .
What a gun was for . . .
“Sometimes I preferred being in the woods alone . . .” [from GH-01-QTF000.00:02:30]
“You called all of the shots . . .” [from GH-01-QTF0002]
Wilderness and the Adirondack Park Agency (APA)
SUPPORTIVE GRAPHICS AND ARCHIVAL MATERIAL TO USE WITH AUDIO OR VIDEO INTERVIEWS
New York State Conservation Commission

Map of Forest Ranger Districts ~ 1912 ~
New York State Forest Ranger District 5

Clinton, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Hamilton, Saratoga, Warren and Washington Counties
Training for new (within 5 years) Forest Rangers of Hidden Valley Ranch, Lake Luzerne, N.Y. – June 7-12, 1970

Second Row, L to R: Howard Graham, Robert Conklin, Peter Fish, Michael Hagadorn, Peter Rossi, Douglas Bissonette, George Stec.
Third Row, L to R: Charles Hurtgarn, John Gillen, Harry De King, James White, Edwin Pierce.
Search and Rescue Team (Region 3 & 4), Meeting in Albany, NY (Oct. 19, 1970)
Ranger Pete Fish in his favorite hiking outfit. Not exactly “official code” dress for rangers!
Helicopter transports
Rescue search
RAY BROOK — The following is the ranger report as released by the state Department of Environmental Conservation for the period of June 21 through July 31.

Essex County, Town of North Elba, High Peaks Wilderness Area

On Saturday, June 21, at approximately 1:58 p.m., DEC dispatch received a call from Essex County 911 reporting an injured hiker on a trail up Mt. Colden. Jeffery Harper, 59, of Savannah, N.Y., had injured his knee, possibly dislocating it, while descending the trail with a group of hikers. DEC Forest Rangers and Interior Caretakers were dispatched to locate and assist. Mr. Harper was located by the interior caretaker. The group had been descending Mt. Colden via the north trail down Colden Creek, when Harper, who was with the Lake Placid Center and then transported to Fletcher Allan Hospital in Burlington, Vt. She was initially in intensive care, but was later upgraded and transferred to a hospital in Montreal, Canada.

Essex County, Town of Keene, High Peaks Wilderness Area

On Friday, July 4, at approximately 3:53 p.m., DEC dispatch received a call from a hiker at Marcy Dam stating that a woman had suffered a lower leg injury near the summit of Mt. Marcy and was unable to bear weight on the injury. DEC Assistant Forest Rangers initially responded and confirmed that Kristina Sym, 23, of Cambridge, Mass., was unable to move due to the injury. The assistant forest rangers splinted the injury and DEC Forest Rangers DEC dispatch received a call from a hiker in the High Peaks stating that he heard someone yelling for help on the side of Mount Colden. DEC Forest Rangers and an Interior Caretaker responded in an attempt to locate the individual. Upon reaching the top of Mount Colden, the caretaker heard the yelling and believed that it came from either in the Trap Dyke or on the slides of Mount Colden. However, when reached, it became clear that the 17-year-old male from Corning was not in need of rescue but had become lost in the dark and had no equipment. He had become separated from both his party and his day pack. Forest rangers escorted him off the mountain and back to his group.

Essex County, Town of Keene, Hurricane Mountain Primitive Area

newcomb Volunteer Ambulance Squad responded and transported via ambulance to the hospital for further evaluation and treatment.

Hamilton County, Town of Indian Lake, Blue Mountain Wild Forest

On Tuesday, July 15, at approximately 4 p.m., DEC dispatch received a call from the Blue Mountain Lake Fire Department reporting an injured hiker on the Blue Mountain Trail. Bob Purvis, 60, of Farmington, had suffered a lower ankle injury approximately 0.9 miles from the trail head and required assistance. A DEC Forest Rangers, Blue Mountain Lake Volunteer Fire and Rescue and the Indian Lake Volunteer Fire Department responded and assisted Purvis to the trail head at approximately 6:06 p.m.

Warren County, Town of Lake George, Lake George Wild Forest

On Tuesday, July 15, at approximately 5:30 p.m., DEC dispatch received a call from the Warren County Sheriff reporting that a search had started for a missing hiker on the trail to the summit of Prospect Mountain. DEC forest rangers responded and located Stephen Toe, 31, of Desplaines, IL off the trail, suffering from dehydration. After Toe received liquids, he was escorted back to his vehicle at approximately 7 p.m., where he was given further medical attention.
Ground search maps – used in searches for lost/missing hikers
A great resource: The New York State Forest Rangers Web site
Over the years the duties of Forest Rangers have changed and diversified tremendously. Understandably in the days of uncontrollable forest fire holocausts, the chief concern of Rangers was preventing and extinguishing forest fires. Protecting State lands from trespass and misuse were quick to follow as duties. Next were the construction and expansion of recreational facilities—trails, lean-tos, campsites, etc. Recreational use by the public brought on search and rescue duties. Environmental concerns promoted a whole new range of duties to educate, to study and to manage natural resources for the future. Forest Rangers still carry out many of their traditional assignments; but in today’s complicated world, they also have an important new role helping the Department of Environmental Conservation to bring effective planning and management to New York State’s natural resources. With concern about our environment steadily growing, Forest Rangers will continue to be part of the Division of Lands and Forests team of resource managers.
From Pete Fish
Papers at Adirondack Research Library, Union College
Forest Ranger Found Innocent of Charges

RAY BROOK (AP) — State Forest Ranger Peter Fish has been cleared of charges he mishandled a search for two skiers lost in sub-freezing weather for four days on Mount Marcy.

Arbitrator Charles Weintraub found Fish innocent of every charge and ordered that all reference to the incident be deleted from Fish's personnel record.

"He wakes up every morning and says 298 or 297 days until he retires," Carolyn Fish, the ranger's wife, told the Plattsburgh Press-Republican.

The arbitrator ruled that Fish acted properly in the search and rescue of two skiers lost atop the state's highest peak March 4-7, 1989.

The two skiers, Ralph Vecchio and Shawn Dougher, both of Stroudsburg, Pa., survived four frigid days in the wilderness with only the clothes on their backs, a sandwich and a can of beer. They were severely frostbitten and had to have limbs amputated.

The New York state Department of Environmental Conservation charged that Fish failed to act quickly in initiating the search and that he did not notify his superiors the skiers might be lost two nights before they were actually reported missing. The state agency sought to suspend Fish for two weeks without pay.

The department said Fish should have responded when he was told that cross-country skis rented by one of the men had not been returned to the Adirondack Loj on March 4.

Fish checked the trailhead registration and found Dougher's name but no number of hiking days listed. He said he was not concerned because someone coming from as far away as Pennsylvania would likely camp overnight.

The first report that the two men were missing didn't come until 11:30 p.m. March 6, when the owner of the White Sled motel discovered they had left their gear behind in a room.

Department officials also contended that the ranger should have sent the search party into the wilderness at 7 a.m. the next day instead of 9 a.m. That charge was dropped during the arbitration when DEC officials agreed that the 9 a.m. starting time was normal, said Fish's attorney, Earl Butler.

The arbitrator found Fish's witnesses very credible, Butler said.

Testifying for Fish at the two-day hearing last month were Rangers Fred LaFlow, Gary Hodgson, Thomas Eakin, retired district Ranger Charlie Severance, James Wagner of the Mountaineer outdoors store in Keene Valley, and Gerard Dumphry, past executive director of the Adirondack Mountain Club.

"What we're really talking about here was a matter of judgment and whether it should be second-guessed, and he [the arbitrator] found that it shouldn't be," Butler said.

In his 14-page decision, the arbitrator speculated that the only reason the charges were brought against Fish was because Dougher and Vecchio were severely injured, Butler said.

Fish, of Keene, is a 20-year veteran of the ranger force and is looked upon as something of a folk hero among High Peaks hikers. He's known for his dedication to the job and his no-nonsense lectures for poorly prepared campers.

As word of the disciplinary proceeding spread throughout the state, the DEC received letters supporting Fish. Butler said, however, that the arbitrator reached his verdict strictly on the merits of the case and did not look at the letters.

The incident also touched off a debate in the camping and hiking community about who should ultimately be responsible for those venturing into the wilderness: the state or the hikers.

Pete Fish was unavailable for comment Monday, but Carolyn Fish said she felt "good, but it's only halfway done."
An article about Ranger Peter Fish that appeared in our local newspaper is entitled "Popular Adirondacks Ranger Accused of Delaying Search." It relates how officials of the State Department of Environmental Conservation have graded him unsatisfactorily and are seeking to suspend him for two weeks without pay because he didn’t properly rescue those two ignorant guys who got lost last winter after trekking Mt. Marcy with beer and no winter parka.

The article has angered many of us in the Southern Tier of New York. I don’t Ranger Fish personally, but I’ve encountered him many times on the High Peaks trails about his involvements, heard him give presentations, etc. In my opinion he should be a bonus for his dedication.

It sounds like Peter is getting a raw deal.
WILDERNESS LOVED TO DEATH?

More from the Pete Fish Papers at Adirondack Research Library, Union College
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Lunch on Mt Marcy, September 1, 1919 (New York State Archives)