REED

THE ORAL HISTORY OF A DISTINCTIVE COLLEGE

A proposal on behalf of the Reed College Alumni Association

March, 2004

“Get the stories before they’re lost forever.”

-- Gary Snyder ‘51
REED: THE ORAL HISTORY OF A DISTINCTIVE COLLEGE

In Short

- Interview 275 Reed alumni from the 1920s through 1981.
- Interview a select number of former administrators and faculty emeriti.
- Capture an oral history of Reed’s social, cultural, and academic history.
- Create a book for Reed’s centennial in 2011 that weaves excerpts from the oral histories with archival photographs into a compelling historical and sociological perspective of the “Reed experience.”

Background

As Reed nears its centennial, its institutional memory, borne largely by a generation that linked the college’s founding ideals and the legacy of its first half century to the present day, is in danger of being lost forever.

Within the last few years, many of the principal bearers of Reed’s story—among them Florence Lehman ‘41, Dorothy Johansen ‘33, and Ellen Knowlton Johnson ‘38—have passed away, taking their memories with them. In the same period, Reed has lost many long-term members of the faculty and administration.

While the high ideals and sense of community that have made Reed one of the country’s most distinctive colleges are well known, relatively little has been documented concerning how those ideals and sense of community evolved, and what they meant in practice. This knowledge exists mostly in the recollections of a portion of the community that has already begun to vanish.

An institution that has lost touch with its own history can have only a tenuous claim on its sense of distinctiveness and direction. As the College approaches its 100th year, capturing its history can help to safeguard Reed’s distinctiveness for the next 100 years. A collective history can also help to support and strengthen the fierce sense of loyalty Reed has generated among its graduates over the generations.

The Oral History Project

Launched by the Reed College Alumni Association in 1999, the Reed College Oral History Project seeks to collect 275 oral history interviews from Reed alumni graduating prior to 1981, as well as from former faculty and administrators.

1 Working title.
The Oral History Project is entirely driven by Reed alumni. Alumni historians have designed the project, established protocols and forms, and trained alumni volunteers in the art of interviewing. Professional archivists from among the alumni, working closely with the Reed Archives, have been enlisted to manage the collection and archive the interviews. Project coordinators have been assigned at the various alumni chapters throughout the country, with each coordinator overseeing several volunteer alumni interviewers. Completed transcripts are housed in the Reed Archives for future research about the college.

Because the purpose of oral history is to record information and perspectives that have not been previously documented, oral histories by nature emphasize the experience of individuals against the backdrop of historical events and societal trends. In the case of the Reed community, the Oral History Project is unearthing colorful anecdotes, fascinating stories of pranks and political intrigue, relevant events both great and small, and traditions and rites of passage unique to the Reed experience.

By June 2004, the Oral History Project will have collected and archived approximately 75 oral histories, on target for reaching the goal of 275 histories by 2009.

The Book

The book will tell the Reed community’s history in the words of its members. Through their own accounts of their personal experiences and insights, the interviewees will compellingly render the Reed experience from 1911 to 1981.

Kenneth Kann’s oral history book, *Comrades and Chicken Ranchers: The Story of a California Jewish Community*, provides a model for the book. “Good oral history,” Kann writes, “is the product of a singular collaboration between oral historian and narrator, who join together to create the language, the facts, and the perspectives that constitute the work.” Kann’s landmark publication establishes a standard for tackling the oral historian’s challenge of giving perspective to someone else’s experience without violating that person’s views of his or her own experience. Using selection and arrangement of multiple narrators’ words, Kann interprets their experiences to create a compelling story of people, time, and place.

The book will be organized thematically rather than chronologically, with excerpts from individual interviews shaped to provide dramatic tension and thematic coherence. One narrator’s story will be placed beside another’s for contrast, agreement, or illumination of truths and insights and myths. Newspaper accounts from Reed publications such as the Quest and from regional newspapers will supplement the narrators’ accounts, providing historical and sociological perspective.

The book, approximately 200 pages in length, will be published in an 8 1/2 x 10 1/2 inch format and bound with a sewn paperback cover. Photos drawn from the Reed Archives
will be interspersed among the double text columns to illustrate events described in the narrative. Although written principally for Reed alumni, current and former faculty and administrators, and current students, the book should also have value for future students and others with a personal or professional interest in the history of the college.

Editorial Approach

Oral historians have recommended that the project only deal with history prior to 1981. This 30-year separation from 2011 provides for greater perspective and, perhaps more importantly, increases the likelihood that narrators will be more forthcoming about sensitive or controversial events. The 1981 cut-off also corresponds with two important turning points in the college’s history—its emergence from the financial crises of the 1970s and the shift in student services marked by the end of Jack Dudman’s tenure as Dean.

The oral history will strive neither to burnish nor to tarnish the college’s reputation, but to present a fair, balanced and credible account of Reed’s history prior to 1981. It will present historical issues and events in which the Reed community takes pride along with those that have provoked controversy and reflection, recounting the good and the less good alike in the words of those directly involved.

The book will excerpt from only a subset of the oral history project’s interviews. The book’s historian-editor will cull from the body of interviews compiled by the oral history project the ones best-suited to illustrate the themes and perspectives he or she deems critical to relating an interesting and coherent history of the college community. Each narrator’s story will be edited to produce clear, lively, and purposeful reading by excising the repetitions, digressions and unintelligible utterances that inevitably characterize literal transcripts of spoken words. Names and dates will also be checked and corrected for accuracy, but because oral history is as much about memory as it is about chronological facts, the book will not attempt to reconcile differing recollections of the same events.

A professional editor, ideally a historian with strong storytelling abilities who is well acquainted with Reed, will be hired to edit the book. The Alumni Association Board will appoint a small editorial review committee representative of the larger Reed community to review and approve the final manuscript for publication.

Prospective Chapters

The following outline is provided for prospective purposes only, and will be revisited in the future as the project continues to crystallize.

I. Introduction

A Brief Overview of Reed’s First Two Decades
(To be drawn largely from Dorothy Johansen’s early history of the college and William Foster’s scrapbook)

II. William Foster’s Vision Over Time

1. The Faculty-led College
2. The Honor Principle and Other Unwritten Codes
3. Herding Cats: Presidents & Notable Administrators (alumni, faculty, administrator narrators)
4. Post WWII: The Transition to a National Student Body
5. Perpetual Financial Crisis
6. Faculty-Student Ratio and Relations

II. The Place

1. Ladd’s Farm: The Physical Campus
2. The Portland Perception
3. Italian Truck Farm & Holly Business
4. Canyon Day
5. Lost Buildings

III. The Reed Experience

1. Why Reed?
2. Defining the Reed Experience
3. A Sense of Community
4. First Impressions & Rites of Passage
5. Humanities
6. Reed Traditions
7. Reed Houses
8. The Thesis

IV. Passions and Pastimes

1. Work Hard, Play Hard
2. Radical Politics
3. Reed In Wartimes
4. Socials & Sex
5. The Doyle Owl & Other Pranks
6. Reed Athletics, The Quest, & Student Organizations
7. The Arts

V. Conclusion: The Lifetime Value of a Reed Education

Appendix: Significant Events in Reed’s History (Timeline)
Legal Use and Copyright

The oral history transcripts are the legal property of Reed College, which holds literary rights and copyrights for them. Because the transcriptions will be selectively excerpted, edited, woven into a new narrative for the book, and combined with other materials such as newspaper accounts or the editor’s introductions, it is recommended that the book itself be published and, if possible, copyrighted by the Reed College Alumni Association.

This follows a precedent set by Pomona College for their 2001 oral history book, “A Generation Remembers: Pomona College and the World War II Years.” Citing the Alumni Association as the book’s publisher will provide the College with some defensible distance, if need be, from its publication. It will also acknowledge the efforts of the association in initiating and collecting the archive of oral histories.

Book Advisory Team

An ad hoc book advisory team, comprised of selected alumni and Reed administrative staff, has been formed to assist the Alumni Association with planning for the book. All members serve on a voluntary basis at the pleasure of the Alumni Board president. The initial charge of the team has been to provide recommendations for the scope, design and format of the book.

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Profession</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paula Barclay</td>
<td>Editor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lauren Lassleben ’75</td>
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<td>John Laursen ’67</td>
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<td>Chris Lowe ’82</td>
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<tr>
<td>John Sheehy ’82</td>
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<td>Gay Walker ’69</td>
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Logistics & Requirements

Timeline

- **September 2001 – June 2009:** conduct 275 oral histories by trained alumni volunteers and professional historians (for faculty and administrators interviews).
- **June 2008 – January 2010:** edit book of oral history excerpts into a manuscript.
- **January 2010 – December 2010:** edit final manuscript and design the book.
- **Spring 2011:** print book.
- **June 2011:** distribute book at Centennial Reunion.

Oral History Collection

- A paid project coordinator will need to be hired in the near-term to oversee management of the increasing number of oral history interviews.
- The transcripts and tapes are all deposited in the Reed Archives, the property of Reed College.
- The transcripts are also maintained on a password protected section of the Reed College web site to be accessed by trained interviewers for research purposes.

Book Production

- An editor will need to be hired to edit the transcripts into a thematic narrative of Reed’s history 1911-1981.
- The Reed College Alumni Association will publish the book and hold the copyright.
- The book will be bound in sewn paperback and printed in a 8 1/2 x 10 1/2inch format, numbering approximately 200 pages.
- Photos from the Reed Archives will be dispersed throughout the book.

Book Print Run & Distribution

- An initial 3,000 copies will be printed.
- 500 copies will be provided to the Reed Development Office for gift purposes related to soliciting donations from alumni as part of the Centennial Campaign.
- The remaining 2,500 copies will be marketed for sale to alumni through Reed magazine, at alumni reunion gatherings, and in the College bookstore with the goal of recapturing most, if not all, of the production costs of the book.
Estimated Budget

The costs of the oral history book (not including costs related to gathering the oral histories, which will be funded separately) is estimated to be roughly $82,000 in 2004 dollars (or approximately $98,000 in 2010 dollars assuming a average annual compounded inflation factor of 3%). This estimate is composed of the following costs:

Editorial
- Editor’s Fee $53,000
- Copyediting
- Proofreading

Total Editorial $53,000

Production
- Typesetting
- Design
- Printing
- Paper
- Binding

Total Production $22,000

Photo Reproduction $5,000
Shipping $500
Miscellaneous $1,500

Sub-total Estimated Costs $82,000 (2004 dollars)

Est. Inflation Increase $16,000 (2004-2010)

Total Estimated Costs $98,000 (2010 dollars)

Cash Flow (based on 2004 dollars)

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Totals $53,000 $10,000 $12,000 $7,000 $82,000
Proposed Funding

The goal of this project is to breakeven on the full costs of the book through a combination of book sales and grants.

The initial print run of the book has been conservatively estimated at 3,000 copies. For the purposes of this proposal, it is assumed that 500 copies will be purchased by the Reed Development Office for gift purposes related to the Centennial Campaign, and the remaining 2,500 copies marketed to alumni and students through Reed magazine, the Centennial alumni gatherings, and the College bookstore. To test the print run assumption, advance orders for the book will be solicited beginning in 2010, a full year before publication.

Assuming a price point of $32.50, selling all 3,000 copies of the book would generate roughly $98,000 in sales revenue, achieving breakeven. Since the incremental unit costs of the book are estimated at approximately $4.00, any sales above the 3,000 print run would generate a health unit profit.

To fund development of the book, the Alumni Association respectfully requests that the College advance the funding required against future sales of the book. The Alumni Association proposes to reduce the risk of the College’s advance through pre-publication book orders and, with the College’s assistance, the pursuit of grants to offset development costs.