

Center for History and New Media

[Building a Better Yesterday, Bit by Bit]

Bracero History Archive—Collaborative Documentation in the Internet Age

<http://braceroarchive.org>

Final Performance Report

Grant # PM-50062-07

May 2007-June 2010

We are pleased to report that the project partners have completed principal work on the *Bracero History Archive*. As a collaboration between the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University (GMU) and several partners, including the Oral History Institute at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), the National Museum of American History (NMAH), and the Center for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in America at Brown University (CSREA), the project has been recognized as a model of both archival practices and collaboration amongst humanities institutions and publics.

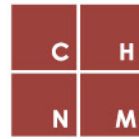
Bracero History Archive has grown to an extraordinary collection of oral histories, objects, photographs, and documents that continue to shed light on the bracero experience. Researchers are using the archive to do academic work, and teachers are using the teaching materials in their classrooms. The site not only collects the archival material, but also offers it to the public along with supporting material.

We are proud to announce that in January 2010, the *Bracero History Archive* was awarded the 2009 Outstanding Public Project by the National Council on Public History. It is gratifying that public history professionals recognize the merit and impact of the work we have done. The award is a reminder on the project's importance and impact.

Though our progress has been great, the work of the last three years has also been marked by the death of Roy Rosenzweig, the Founding Director of the Center for History and New Media. We continue to mourn this tremendous personal and professional loss, but others have stepped in to complete the work he began. CHNM has significant and continuing support from the Department of History and Art History and GMU as a whole. The Center's Director of Public Projects, Sharon Leon, and Managing Director, Tom Scheinfeldt, have continued work as the Primary Investigators for the *Bracero History Archive*.

In an additional staffing change, James Halabuk joined CHNM as project assistant for the Archive. Halabuk is a PhD candidate in the Department of History and Art History at GMU, and a student of Rosenzweig's. He completed a teaching field in Latin American and Chicano History, and thus has interests both in digital humanities and in preserving the *bracero* experience.

Here, we are pleased to present a summary of our accomplishments.



Project Content and Components

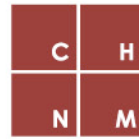
Bracero History Archive

The *Bracero History Archive* <http://braceroarchive.org> has four major content sections that offer users access to its many resources: Archive, Teaching, History, and Resources. An About page gives a short overview of the bracero program in the United States, as well as the history of the *Bracero History Archive*. Likewise, a Partners page describes the many institutions that have partnered to collect items for the archive. From the home page, viewers can access a parallel archive in Spanish, where much of the text and data fields are in Spanish.

By tracking traffic to the *Bracero History Archive*, we are able to observe several trends. First, traffic immediately grew from essentially zero before the official launch to around 2,800 visits each day after the launch. It has actually grown somewhat since then, averaging more than 3,000 unique visitors since then. Second, we can tell that although most visitors are accessing from within the United States, a substantial number of visitors are accessing from Mexico, as well as other countries. As is to be expected, traffic seems to concentrate in states that had significant numbers of braceros: Texas, Arizona, New Mexico, and California.

The **Archive** currently holds a fully searchable collection of 3,174 items collected from a dozen U.S. states and several areas of Mexico. The archive is searchable by keyword or by data field, and is browse-able, as well. Data fields were strictly standardized so that searches are as productive and accurate as possible. Included in the archive are 636 oral histories, which contain audio files of complete interviews, and in many cases written transcripts. Additionally, the archive collects nearly 2,000 photographs, including approximately 1,700 from the Nadel Collection, but also nearly 300 photographs obtained during the interview process or contributed by users. We currently hold more than 500 documents, of such varying types as identification cards, pay stubs, postcards, contracts, and certificates. Finally, visitors to the *Bracero History Archive* have contributed several dozen other items—usually personal stories or recollections—to the archive. Although the original partners have discontinued active collection, the archive continues to grow through user contributions. We are beginning to see the fruition of our outreach even today, as new institutions sign on as partners.

It is difficult not to be affected by some of the very human stories we encountered during this project. Many braceros were able to provide better lives for their families through the program, and some braceros are especially proud to recount the contributions they were able to make as a guest worker. Particularly moving is the story of Juan Loza. In his oral history, Juan recounts the crushing poverty in Mexico that led him to leave his family and work in the United States. Much of his experience was harsh, as he was often mistreated, but he looks back fondly at his work experience, and is both glad and proud to have worked as a bracero. In addition, Loza was willing to allow staff to photograph and scan some of his personal possessions for inclusion in both the *Bracero History Archive* and in the NMAH *Bittersweet Harvest* exhibit. Moreover, Loza was present at the launch of that NMAH exhibit, and it was especially moving to bear witness to his pride at being a part of the bracero program as well as contributing to the *Bracero History Archive*. Loza, like many others, want desperately to tell their stories; *Bracero History Archive* is giving them that opportunity.



The site also includes a **Teaching** section. The section includes a short historical overview of the Bracero Program, as well as a collection of teaching activities. The lesson plans, each available in both English and Spanish, use items from the archive to teach student how to analyze historical photographs, to evaluate historical documents, and to use maps to follow a bracero as he worked in several U.S. states. The lessons were developed by our partners at the National Museum of American History, and provide a wealth of assistance for teachers. National History Standards are included, as well as Historical Thinking Standards, for each activity. Each activity includes an assessment rubric to assist teachers as they evaluate their students' work. The activities are usable as web pages with included links, or are downloadable for use without an Internet connection in the classroom.

The **History** section of the site acts as a collection site for secondary sources pertaining to the bracero program. Included are a basic and an extensive bibliography compiled by academics, and other scholarly resources, such as theses and articles. The number of items included here will grow over time, as we have commitments from several scholars and museum professionals to provide them upon completion.

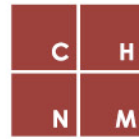
Bracero History Archive's **Resources** page is geared around providing as many resources as possible for partners and users. We provide a URL for users to harvest metadata through OAI-PMH. There is also a collection of video tutorials—the same tutorials used in our Virtual Heritage Meetings, in fact—to train collectors how to conduct oral history interviews; also included are checklists, suggested questions, extensive instructions, and standardized rights releases. Additionally, there is a second set of video tutorials to help users add items to the database, as well as how to create or edit exhibits. Finally, we provide a downloadable Guide to Collaborative Documentation, which is both a summary of the process used to build the *Bracero History Archive* and a step-by-step guide to collaborative work in general. Overall, the resources provide assistance for nearly every aspect of the site's objectives: acquiring, collecting, adding, and providing.

In addition, the site offers several other important features that help users more fully appreciate the bracero experience:

The **Tell Your Story** feature on the site's home page takes visitors to a form where they can contribute their own item to the archive. The feature allows them to type or paste in their own narrative, or to upload their own video or audio files, as well as images or documents. These contributions must be approved by a site administrator—to eliminate spam or abusive comments, but then are included in the archive; these items are fully searchable, and are included in the results of a keyword search.

The **My Archive** feature allows users to tag or annotate items as they browse, and to create a poster or exhibit using items from the archive. They simply log in, select items of interest, and add notes or tag items; when they are finished, the site publishes their exhibit, along with their notes, using a unique URL. Teachers can use this as an assignment for students, or researchers can use it as a note-taking system. To date, users have created more than 200 posters using this function.

Site **News** keeps visitors apprised of the archive's current news. For example, we announced the locations of oral history collection dates and sites using the News section, and we currently use the News section to announce the locations for the Smithsonian Museum of American History's travelling bracero exhibit.



Publicity and Outreach

Publicity

We prepared for the launch of the Bracero history Archive with a series of presentations at academic conferences, including the Society of American Archivists, the Texas Association of Museums, the Oral History Association, the New England Council of Latin American Studies, and the National Humanities Conference. To highlight our publicity phase, we were invited to Portland, Oregon to receive the 2009 Outstanding Public History Award given by the National Council on Public History.

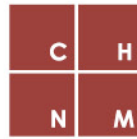
Additionally, we used postcards to announce the launch of the site. Using professional and personal contacts, we sent out hundreds of postcard mailers announcing the site's launch, and handed out many more at conferences and events. We utilized the H-Net organization to target announcements to the 21 H-Net groups for which bracero history is relevant.

Fortuitously, the launch of the *Bracero History Archive* coincided with the opening of NMAH's *Bittersweet Harvest* exhibit. The exhibit (which opened in Washington D.C., but continues to travel to institutions throughout the country) featured a computer terminal for users to access the *Bracero History Archive* and add their own stories. At the exhibit's launch, a gala affair attended by scholars, administrators, U.S Representatives, and braceros, we handed out additional cards; one of our partners, Matthew Garcia of CSREA moderated a roundtable discussion and was able to announce the archive's launch.

Most currently, Sonoma County Museum in California has begun its collection efforts. To coincide with its *Bittersweet Harvest* exhibit beginning in November, museum staff have trained themselves using only resources on the *Bracero History Archive* site. Using our resources, they reached out to the Latino and rancher communities there and identified several ranchers, former braceros and bracero family members. Later this month, in fact, they will conduct the interviews and add those histories to the archive along with any supporting material they can scan. This reinforces one of the major goals of the project: to empower institutions to do their own collecting and allow them to add to the growing archive.

A number of newspapers took interest in the efforts to build the archive. *Bracero History Archive* was mentioned in numerous newspapers, including the *New York Times*, the *Arizona Daily Star*, *La Prensa Latina*, the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, *El Hispanic News*, the *Ventura County Star*, the *Camarillo Acorn*, and *Northern Vision*, the University of Northern Colorado's alumni magazine. A *Bracero History Archive* staff member was interviewed by the Associated Press, as well, and we have received several requests from documentarians and filmmakers seeking the use of archive items to tell their stories.

We also took advantage of every available opportunity to enter the Bracero History Archive for various academic awards. These award committees provided invaluable feedback, but also gave us additional exposure within those academic communities.



Guide to Collaborative Documentation

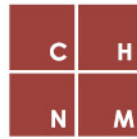
The Guide to Collaborative Documentation is also part of our publicity drive. Developed for distribution to institutions that intend to collaborate with other partners, the Guide represents both a record of our efforts and a plan for digital-age collaboration. It is freely available in the Resources section of the website.

Project Sustainability

One major task was developing the digital infrastructure for the website and project. In considering the long-term stability and sustainability of the project, we decided the optimum framework for website would be the new Omeka web publishing platform. Omeka is a free, standards-based, open-source web platform for publishing collections and exhibitions online. Designed specifically by CHNM for cultural institutions, enthusiasts, and educators and funded with a national leadership grant from IMLS, Omeka facilitates community-building around collections and exhibits and features a standardized Dublin Core metadata structure and standards-based design that is fully accessible and interoperable with other widely used collections management packages. This means that metadata for the *Bracero History Archive* is standardized according to widely accepted library and archival standards and the front end website complies with WC3 and web accessibility standards, including section 508. It also means that the website is fully compatible with Zotero, CHNM's research management tool, currently in use by nearly 1,000,000 scholars and students worldwide. Additionally, *Bracero History Archive* is featured on the Omeka "showcase" as an example for others who are interested in building scholarly online exhibitions. As a free, open source project under active development by a diverse and dispersed community of programmers and designers and being used by hundreds of other institutions around the world, we believe the Omeka infrastructure provides a clear, low-cost technology upgrade path and the best chance for maintaining the project as a viable resource for years to come.

Omeka's versatility and open-source pedigree offer other advantages, as well. The opportunities for functional expansion through plug-ins is nearly unlimited. Currently, we have enabled several plug-ins that enhance the user experience: the Geolocation plug-in uses GIS information to place archive objects on a map; Exhibit Builder allows site administrators to easily construct virtual exhibits or tours using items in the archive; the Social Bookmarking function permits users to incorporate social bookmarking (including Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, or dozens of others) into their archive experience. New plug-ins are released regularly, and Omeka actively encourages users to develop plug-ins by providing instructions and code.

Our Contribution feature commits us to the moderation of user-contributed items indefinitely. We are prepared to monitor the site for new entries, and to approve them for inclusion the archive. Our work with other sites that allow user contribution suggests that visitors may continue adding material for years; as the Smithsonian exhibit travels we anticipate spikes in both site traffic and in contributions.



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We are proud to have been associated with the *Bracero History Archive*. It collects in one place thousands of pieces of a larger history. The archive provides scholars access to stories and documents previously unavailable; it provides classroom teachers a framework to discuss an important aspect of North American history and reinforce critical historical skills; it allows family members to access stories or fragments of the lives of relatives who worked in the United States decades ago. The archive offers resources for serious scholars and for family members seeking a fuller understanding of a relative's bracero experience. While we believe these assets to be a necessary and important contribution to Latino scholarship, we are equally proud of the resources that accompany the archive. We offer empowerment to individuals and institutions who wish to add their own—or their family's—story to the archive, and we offer a framework for those who wish to develop their own collaborative project. Despite the challenges we faced, we have met and exceeded our original goals.

We would be delighted to provide more detailed information on the project. We would particularly welcome an opportunity to share the features of the archive with NEH staff, either in a conference call or in a visit to CHNM at GMU at any convenient time.

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