

## **Fieldwork in Folklore Research Trip Returns to Virginia in October 2015**

Gainesville, FL--This fall, students and staff from the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (SPOHP) will return to the Middle Peninsula of Virginia, continuing the Fieldwork in Folklore research trip into its second year and building interviews for the Tidewater Main Street Project.

In October 2014, the inaugural Fieldwork in Folklore trip, led by then-graduate coordinator Jessica Taylor, collected 30 interviews in connection with the College of William & Mary, the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, and Mathews and Middlesex County Historical Societies. Over the past year, SPOHP staff and students continued working with local institutions from both Middlesex and Mathews Counties, cultivating partnerships and developing content with archivists, archaeologists, retired volunteers, and professional writers. In the process, all 30 interviews have been transcribed, shared with host communities, and archived online, now available through the University of Florida Digital Collections archive at: <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/tmp/all>

This year, Taylor will lead the second annual Fieldwork in Folklore trip and return to the Virginia Tidewater region with SPOHP staff and students during October 21-26, 2015. This year's trip will focus on the environmental and economic sustainability of local fishing and tourism industries, in connection with Mathews County historians and professionals. One geographical foci will be Tangier, an island halfway between the Middle Peninsula and the Eastern Shore with a unique dialect well-known to linguists and anthropologists. Partially as a cause of global warming, the island has shrunk from around two thousand inhabitable acres in the mid-1800s to under 83 inhabitable acres in 2014. Many residents are leaving their "sinking" home, and the story of their endangered community is likely to be replicated along the fringes of the Chesapeake Bay.

The possibility of the extinction of centuries-old communities like Tangier represents new questions and methodological challenges to oral historians globally: how do environmental crises and the endangerment of communities change how people think about their histories and traditions? How should historians sensitively address crises in their host communities? With a keen eye on environmental history, and a comparative approach linking Mathews and Lancaster on the mainland to its island neighbor in distress, SPOHP is in a prime position to address questions dominating discourse in Virginia as well as in Florida.

Students and staff will also workshop with members of the Christ Church Foundation, the Mary Ball Washington Museum, and the Middle Peninsula African American Historical and Genealogical Society, teaching on the fundamentals of oral history. Promising to be SPOHP's largest and most diverse audience of professionals and community members yet, the workshop will be held on October 24, 2015 at Historic Christ Church in Lancaster. At the request of the Mathews County Historical Society, students and staff will also present together on October 25, 2015, discussing SPOHP's work across the Southeast at the Mathews County Memorial Library. In an encore presentation of "Standing With Our Elders:

Fieldwork in the South,” which will be presented the preceding week at the Oral History Association's annual meeting in Tampa, senior staff members Diana Dombrowski and Sarah Blanc, undergraduate student Patrick Daglaris, and Jessica Taylor will discuss oral history projects in North Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, and Alabama.

The Virginia Fieldwork in Folklore trip seeks to demonstrate the usefulness of history to UF students, and the utility of the major in their own lives. Research puts history students in conversation with professionals working in the fields of digital humanities, law, nonprofit work, archaeology, folklore, and American Studies from institutions including the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, the College of William and Mary, and the Johns Hopkins University.

The Virginia Fieldwork in Folklore trip is co-sponsored by the Mathews Historical Society, Mathews County Memorial Library, Historic Christ Church, the Fairfield Foundation, and the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program. For more information, please contact the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program at <http://oral.history.ufl.edu>, call the office at 352-392-7168, or e-mail trip coordinator Jessica Taylor at [jxtayl@ufl.edu](mailto:jxtayl@ufl.edu).

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