



*Collection of all 5 Oral History Publications produced by Allegany High School students.*

## *Capturing A Moment In Time*

*Written by: Dan Whetzel*

*Photography by: Lance C. Bell*

Social Studies students at Allegany High School in Cumberland, Maryland, have successfully participated in an oral history program for the last ten years. Systematically documenting important events, people, and places has been a key element in the program that records the experiences of Allegany County residents. Students are involved in all aspects of the work, from interviewing residents to graphic layout design of the annual publications. Like many opportunities, the oral history program at Allegany High began in an unexpected way.

In 1993, the History Department at Frostburg State University organized an After Victory Symposium to commemorate the 50th anniversary of VJ Day. Nationally known personalities were invited to attend, but the sponsors sought a local component to the program. The social studies department at Allegany High School was invited to participate, and they eagerly accepted the challenge. It was decided the symposium would provide a unique opportunity to document local history while involving students in a noteworthy academic experience.

Subsequently, an extracurricular oral history program was designed that would engage Allegany students in interviewing residents about a variety of experiences from the time period. Results of their interviews and primary research findings were presented at the symposium in 1995.

A chance visit to a local factory formed the genesis of the next project—documenting a pristinely preserved Lonaconing Silk Mill that closed its doors in 1957. Four students agreed to interview former mill employees and research on-site resources. Over the next two years, documents were investigated at the Lonaconing facility, and twelve employees interviewed about their work experiences. An important decision was reached following the interviews and research to create a publication highlighting results of the work. A manuscript was prepared, and primary resources were organized in a rudimentary manner. Kathie Smith, of AAD-INC., provided key support in graphic design and layout services that established the high quality standards the booklet format has maintained since that time. Allegany High's first publication,



*Seminar Students pose for the May 7th, 2003 book signing of Work and Wait, held at Allegany High School.*



*Student Photo*

*Interviewers Kevin Hill (student) and Matt Young (student) discuss the Palace and Lyric theaters of Frostburg, Maryland, with owners Moe and Jack Spates.*

*The Lonaconing Silk Mill, 1907-1957*, received recognition as the National Oral History Association Award Winner, in 1999. The book was also reprinted in *Labor Heritage*, the international publication of the George Meany Archives in Silver Spring, Maryland, thus publicizing the student's work to a broader market while highlighting a local historical treasure.

A decision was made prior to the 1999-2000 academic year to incorporate an oral history program into the school curriculum as a semester elective course called Social Studies Seminar. This decision was prompted by suggestions from students enrolled in the seminar class who saw the benefits of working full time on oral history projects. Dan Whetzel and Brian White, coordinators for the program, believed that such a class offering would increase the number of students who could participate, while also providing for a more efficient use of time. With a staff of 12 students and two teachers, *Reflections of the Silver Screen, A History of*

*Allegany County Theatres* was published in the Spring of 2000. The book featured a history of twenty theatres and several drive-ins. Another important step was taken that year by incorporating graphic design into the course, thereby making academic experiences more comprehensive.

Building on the success of the first two titles, the 2000-2001 publication was even more expansive, recording the life of experiences of residents during the Great Depression. Unlike previous works that focused primarily on places, the Depression was a time period with many facets of life to be considered including political, social, and economic components. The student staff increased to 17 and the final product, *Surviving The Great Depression In Allegany County*, was 80 pages in length. It was also during 2001 that a plan was developed for future works, focusing initially on the 1930's and moving forward to the 1960's.

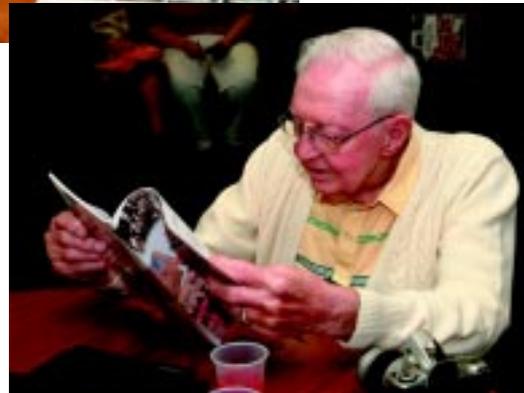
Following the long-range plan, *Through Their Service, Allegany County Veterans of World War II*, was begun in the fall of 2001. A comprehensive publication, 76 interviews and transcriptions were completed by students, and the number of published pages increased from the previous year. A new feature of the program was integrated into the course—video production. Through the generous support of Vietnam War Veterans Chapter 172, digital technology was utilized so students could explore yet another way to capture a moment in time. All interviews were taped in digital format, thus enabling students to create the video production, *Through Their Eyes*, a 60-minute documentary combining local veteran's interviews with newsreel footage from the National Archives in College Park, Maryland.

Allegany's most recent publication, *Work and Wait, Allegany County: The Home Front Years, 1941-1945*, was published through the efforts of 30 students, the largest staff to date. The book features 88 pages of information about the county during a time when personal sacrifices were required of residents, so they could focus on military success abroad and increased industrial production at home.

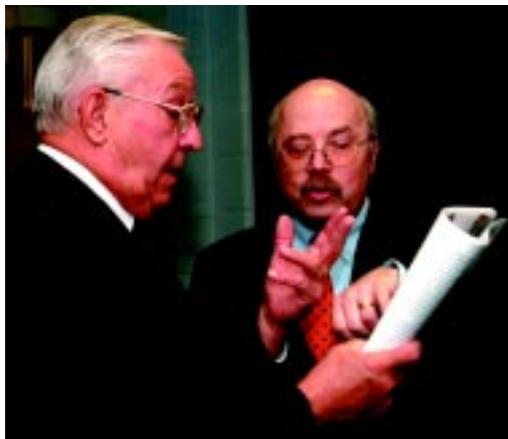
Students are involved in every aspect of the work, and each year the process becomes more efficient. Students are presented with assignments that require them to demonstrate skills in a variety of areas including interviewing, researching primary documents, writing the manuscript, transcribing interviews, and designing a book layout. Many out-of-school hours are spent by both teachers and students in preparing for the publication because tasks cannot always be completed in the class time allotted. Motivated students are definitely a key to the success of the program, and much of their inspiration comes from those who preceded them. No other academic work comes under such public scrutiny, and they are aware the final product will be examined by thousands of residents who have expectations of high quality work. Students are also aware of the opportunity they will have to personally meet all oral history participants and business partners on the evening of the book signing, held each spring in the school library. The event is much anticipated by local history buffs and participants who fill the room to enjoy the culmination of a year's work. Students become richer in the knowledge they have successfully fulfilled their mission to capture a moment in the life of Allegany County residents.



*Marjorie Gray, 2003 graduate, autographs a copy of Work and Wait during the book signing.*



*Majorie's grandfather, Ronald Cunningham.*



*Bob Reinhart and Bill Rudd discuss Allegany's most recent publication, Work and Wait, Allegany County: The Home Front Years, 1941-1945*

To insure the student's work is available to a wide reading audience, copies are donated to local libraries and other appropriate depositories. Book sales at local vendors provide the funds to finance upcoming publications and insure the continuation of the program. Through the hard work of students, the generous support of business partners, and support of school administrators, unique academic opportunities for social studies students at Allegany High School will continue. Students are already busy working on the 1950's project for the 2003-2004 academic year, a publication available for sale in May. Be sure to look for the book signing announcement in the *Cumberland Times*.

Allegany High School publications are available at the following locations:

**The Book Center**  
Cumberland, MD, 301-722-2284

**Main Street Books**  
Frostburg, MD, 301-689-5605

**Main Street Books**  
Keyser, WV, 800-519-0209

**The General Store at Canal Place**  
Cumberland, MD, 301-777-0298

**Ft. Ashby Books**  
Ft. Ashby, WV, 304-298-4881

**Allegany High School**  
301-777-0882

