

***PROPOSED LOUIE B. NUNN
CENTER FOR ORAL HISTORY
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY LIBRARIES***

While serving as Barren County Judge, Louie B. Nunn warned a local audience, “Our county’s history is at risk. We can improve this situation by asking our older people about what they remember. If we record what we find out, we will not only learn more of our county history, but we will also leave written information for future generations.”

Later, as Governor of Kentucky Louie Nunn allocated funds to the University of Kentucky Libraries for a non-partisan oral history initiative to document the lives and careers of U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Fred M. Vinson and U.S. Senator Thruston B. Morton. Governor Nunn’s support provided the foundation for UK’s extensive and internationally recognized collection of over 6,000 oral history interviews. Subjects covered in the collection include politics and public policy, Appalachia, civil rights, military history, medical history, agriculture, and education reform. Over 500 interviews are requested annually by researchers and the interviews that have been placed on the World Wide Web are accessed thousands of times annually by researchers worldwide.

Louie B. Nunn served the Commonwealth of Kentucky with distinction as Governor from 1967 to 1971. He is considered by many to be one of the most successful Kentucky governors in the twentieth century, especially in the areas of education and mental health. During his entire life and career he made significant contributions to Kentucky public policy.

During the last years of his life, Governor Nunn recorded over 100 hours of oral history interviews for the UK Oral History Program. It is one of the most extensive and informative life histories in the entire collection. Moreover, Governor Nunn became heavily involved in an effort to secure an endowment for the UK Oral History Program and at the time of his death in 2004 Governor Nunn had helped to secure a quarter of a million dollars toward a two million dollar endowment goal.

Representative Steve Nunn and Jennie Nunn Penn became actively engaged in fulfilling their father’s dream for the UK Oral History Program. Both solicited additional major gifts to the endowment over the next year. During the 2005 Kentucky General Assembly, Representative Nunn successfully sought \$500,000 in additional state funding for the UK Oral History Program and stipulated that the half-million dollars be matched with Research Challenge Trust Funds. These additional funds brought the UK Oral History Endowment to 1.3 million dollars.

The University of Kentucky Libraries now proposes to honor Governor Nunn for his numerous contributions to the Commonwealth and for his major role in the development of the UK Oral History Program by establishing the *Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History*.

BACKGROUND:

For over thirty years the University of Kentucky has sought to build one of the finest and most thorough oral history collections for modern political and public policy research in the United States. Both researchers and archivists from throughout the United States confirm that great progress has been made toward that goal. United States Senate historian Dr. Donald A. Ritchie observed that, “From Supreme Court Justices, United States Senators, and civil rights leaders to farm families, the University of

Kentucky's oral history collection is a model of its kind – not only for the history of Kentucky but for Kentucky's role on the national stage.”

These interviews help to document politics and the development of U.S. governmental policy during the past century and have proven invaluable to undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and independent scholars researching American politics and government.

A bipartisan approach to Kentucky's political and public policy history continues today with oral history projects on the lives and careers of:

A. D. Albright
Rufus B. Atwood
Alben W. Barkley
Edward T. “Ned” Breathitt
A. B. “Happy” Chandler
Thomas D. Clark
Earle C. Clements
Marlow Cook
John Sherman Cooper
Frank G. Dickey
Wendell H. Ford
Morton J. Holbrook
Larry J. Hopkins
Walter D. Huddleston
Brereton C. Jones
Rogers C. B. Morton

Thruston B. Morton
Louie B. Nunn
John Ed Pearce
Katherine G. Peden
O. Leonard Press
Edward F. Prichard, Jr.
Stanley F. Reed
Otis A. Singletary
Albert P. Smith
William Sturgill
Fred M. Vinson
Lawrence W. Wetherby
Charles T. Wethington, Jr.
Wilson W. Wyatt
William T. Young

Other major projects include:

Appalachian History
Broadcasting in Kentucky
Civil Rights Movement
Coalmining
Commission on Women
Family Farms
Frontier Nursing Service
Interscholastic Athletics in Kentucky
John Jacob and Rena Niles
Kentucky Bar Association
Kentucky Conservation

Kentucky Education Reform
Kentucky General Assembly
Kentucky Healthcare
Kentucky Higher Education
Kentucky League of Cities
Kentucky Military Veterans
Kentucky Writers
University of Kentucky History

These major collections are impressive in both the number of interviews and content. But it is the research value of these collections that remains most impressive. Generally, any researcher studying the broad scope of twentieth century American politics benefits from an examination of the U.K. Oral History Collection.

In addition, oral history projects have documented important public policy issues including Kentucky education reform, Kentucky conservation, coal mining, broadcasting in Kentucky, the civil rights movement, a history of Kentucky mayors, a history of the Kentucky General Assembly, and a history of the Lexington Urban League.

Another major initiative has been documenting UK's history. In the *Charles T. Wethington, Jr. Alumni/Faculty Oral History Collection* over 700 interviews have been recorded and preserved with former UK students, faculty, staff, and administrators. This collection of UK recollections is an invaluable source for the University's history and development. It will become the basis for the next published UK history, which is long overdue.

Even before the Library of Congress began an effort to record the memories of American veterans, the UK Oral History Program had already interviewed hundreds of Kentucky veterans of World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. The *Colonel Arthur L. Kelly American Veterans Oral History Collection* is one of the leading collections of interviews with veterans in the United States, and support from the Kentucky General Assembly is helping make this collection available worldwide on the Internet.

The Program relies heavily on grant funding for both interview projects and for transcribing and editing of verbatim transcripts. Transcription is done for both access and preservation purposes. The UK Oral History Program was one of the first in the United States to make its transcripts available on the Web, and is now offering audio versions as well.

The Program's faculty initiates interviewing projects and conducts interviews for the Collection. However, nearly eighty percent of the Oral History Collection has come from independent researchers who deposit their interviews with the Program. The Program offers technical support and serves as an archive for interviews conducted by U.K. faculty and students and for independent researchers from around the world. Over 150 interviews are accessioned annually by the Program.

ADMINISTRATION:

The proposed *Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History* will be an integral part of the University of Kentucky Libraries under the administration of Dean Carol Pitts Diedrichs. The proposed *Nunn Center* will also report through Dr. Terry Birdwhistell, Associate Dean for Special Collections and Digital Programs. Dr. Birdwhistell directed the Oral History Program from 1974 to 2005. He has conducted nearly a thousand oral history interviews and is a past president of the national Oral History Association. Dr. Birdwhistell is Co-Editor of *Kentucky Remembered: An Oral History Series* published by the University Press of Kentucky and he annually teaches a graduate level oral history seminar.

During the UK Libraries' recent reorganization, Oral History was designated one of four major areas within Special Collections and Digital Programs. Mr. Jeffrey Suchanek will serve as Director of the proposed *Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History*. He has over a quarter century of experience as an oral historian serving as Assistant Director and currently Director of the UK Oral History Program.

Over the past thirty-three years the Oral History Program has worked closely with UK faculty across the campus. Faculty in history, political science, agriculture, sociology, education,

English, Women's Studies, anthropology, music, architecture, business, law, medicine, philosophy, and the Appalachian Center have worked closely with the Program. An advisory committee comprised of UK faculty and staff will be assembled to assure that a close working relationship with faculty continues with the Center.

BUDGET:

The Oral History Program has a recurring budget of approximately \$100,000 and the endowment now totals 1.3 million dollars. Funds are used to support acquisition of new interviews, transcribing and editing of interviews, electronic access to the oral history collection, and the development of public and educational programming for both schools and the general public. The endowment will also help support the establishment of a *Beula Nunn Graduate Assistantship* named in honor of the former First Lady of Kentucky. The Oral History Program has been very successful in securing outside grants totaling nearly a half million dollars to support the Program's work.

LOCATION:

The proposed *Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History* occupies a portion of the West Wing (First Floor) of the Margaret I. King Building. The *Nunn Center* will also have access to a meeting facility in which it will regularly sponsor public programs and speakers addressing issues relating to oral history research. Distance learning and Internet technologies will be utilized to deliver oral history workshops and other programming to schools and other sites throughout Kentucky.

The establishment of the *Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History* recognizes and honors Governor Nunn and his life-long devotion to the betterment of Kentucky and its people. It will be a lasting tribute to Governor Nunn's years of public service and his commitment to supporting UK's Oral History efforts. Moreover, the *Nunn Center* will greatly enhance the University of Kentucky's ability to serve Kentuckians throughout the Commonwealth and everyone interested in the history of the Kentucky and its role in national affairs.