By its nature, oral history is more spontaneous than the written kind. But when UNH historian Judith Moyer ’68, ’71G, ’00G holds public talks about telephone operators in New Hampshire, the history gets so spontaneous it could almost be described as off-the-cuff. “It usually starts out as a lecture but soon becomes a mutual story-weaving, which is great fun, and turns out to be good history,” says Moyer, a research assistant professor. “It’s oral history on the spot.”

Moyer got interested in operators as an extension of her specialty, the history of women’s labor. The research began as the statewide “Number Please” project, funded by the New Hampshire Humanities Council. Volunteers in local communities interviewed former operators and transcribed their stories. Moyer found the subject, a nexus of technology, sociology and small-town life, so fascinating that she is turning it into a book. One of the questions she finds interesting is why an occupation on the cutting edge of technology, like telephone operators in the late 1800s and early 1900s, was quickly dominated by women. Certainly, women could be paid less than men, had few other job options and were more “amenable to discipline,” to use a phrase of the time. One of the reasons may have been technical. “It was said that women’s voices were better on the early telephones that had poor quality sound,” Moyer says.

Perhaps more important, though, is the role that operators played, particularly in small places like New Hampshire towns. Over time, operators evolved into “an answering service, an emergency alarm service, a 911,” she says. It could even be a secretarial service: “You never had to tell anybody you were gone for the day because the operators knew and would tell your callers,” Moyer notes.

“The operators themselves felt very responsible, felt this truly was a worthy service and occupation,” she adds. A worthy topic for a historian, too, as Moyer is reminded every time she talks about it. “It’s academic history, and it’s fun.”

—David Brooks

MAGAZINE WINS GOLD

Broadway has its Tonys, television its Emmys and Hollywood its Oscars, but for institutions of higher education, there are the CASE Awards. So when UNH Magazine won a gold medal for best magazine from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) District I, which includes New England and eastern Canada, UNH President Ann Weaver Hart said, “We are thrilled that the UNH Magazine has won this prestigious award.”

Hart added, “In each issue, people learn about the world class programs we have at UNH in academics, outreach and research. We anticipate many more informative issues produced by our talented staff.”

“We’re very proud that our magazine won this gold medal, which is the most respected award in a CASE district that contains many expensive private colleges and universities,” said Ernie Gale, the UNH Alumni Association’s executive director.

This is the second medal the magazine has won. In 1999, UNH Magazine won a national CASE gold medal for most improved magazine.

SERENDIPITOUS SCIENCE

ROY PLANALP, associate professor of chemistry, was frustrated: His cancer research experiment wasn’t working. But instead of tossing it aside, he took a closer look, thinking that perhaps “we were finding out something that would be useful.”

He was right. Five years later, research by Planalp and his collaborators at the National Institutes of Health and Wake Forest University Health Sciences has yielded a patent for a new chemotherapy.

Instead of making cancer cells more visible to imaging devices, Planalp’s chelator was killing them. The chelator, it turns out, deprives the cancer cells of iron, without which the cells quickly die. Initial testing has shown that iron chelators are effective at killing 64 types of tumor cells, including leukemia, breast cancer and ovarian cancer. Additional studies are underway to improve the chelators’ efficacy before they are expeditied from the body.

Awarded in July, the patent is now being marketed to companies with the goal of producing a viable pharmaceutical agent. Like existing chemotherapy drugs, iron chelators will likely be used in a chemical cocktail of chemotherapy agents.

—Robert Emro
WORTH REPEATING

Jerry didn’t worry about too many people hitting him or catching him. It was awful fun to watch him doing it.”
—UNH football coach Sean McDonnell ’78, on the athletic skills of Chicago Bear Jerry Azumah ’99 while at UNH. Azumah was selected to play in the 2004 Pro Bowl as a starting kick return specialist.

Hooked on Books ’n Beans

Book Eaters is an apt name for associate professor of education Ruth Wharton-McDonald’s book group. Not only do students devour a new title every month, but a supply of good snacks is vital to their discussion.

About a dozen students from Oyster River Middle School and UNH attend the after-school gatherings one Wednesday of every month at Durham’s public library. There’s only one agenda: to talk about books and have fun. In December it was The Monsters of Monty Manor by Bruce Coville.

The group’s structure is very flexible. It’s fine to come without finishing the book and you don’t have to commit to coming every month. There are no tests or evaluations. The only constant is enthusiasm for books, and a giant jar of jellybeans.

Often the books the middle schoolers choose are new to Wharton-McDonald and her UNH students, which she says makes them more participants than leaders. The UNH students who volunteer for the group are studying to become teachers after they graduate and have taken Wharton-McDonald’s literacy course.

“This is a great way to learn what students are reading and what interests them, because most of these titles weren’t around when I was in middle school,” says Ellen Donohue, a senior from Manchester, N.H. “I mostly listen because the kids are so excited and have so much to say,” she adds.

Wharton-McDonald says the group is “a great learning opportunity for all of us, and a fun way to strengthen ties between UNH and the town.” Her goal is not reading skills per se but about helping kids become lifelong readers for pleasure. “I want the kids to see reading can be a social activity,” she says.

She just makes sure not to forget the jellybeans.
—Erika Mantz

BRING ON THE SNOW

Starting in 1922 and for decades afterwards, Winter Carnival at UNH entailed elaborate snow sculptures, like the early 1960s train above, as well as ski, skate, sledding and snowshoe competitions, a Carnival Ball, banquets and pageants. In recent years, however, unreliable weather has put a damper on snow-dependent events. Today’s students have taken Winter Carnival inside the MUB, where they will cavort on a nine-hole miniature golf course, compete on an inflatable track in the bizarre-sounding “Toilet Racers,” and visit booths for airbrush tattoos, antique photos and the Annual Durham Pizza Taste-off.

To remind the campus of what Winter Carnival could be, the UNH Museum will host a Winter Carnival exhibit through Feb. 27. Given a nice blizzard or two, snow sculptures may make a return.
—Dale Valena