

Oral History: Methods for Documentation And Research

Presented by
Historical Society of Cecil County
in partnership with
Cecil County Public Schools

November 2005

This guide was made possible, in part,
through a grant from the Maryland
Humanities Council.



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What is Oral History?

Oral history is a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting historical information through recorded interviews with people, communities and participants in past events and ways of life. Those interviewed do not have to be famous or of historical importance; they can be everyday people talking about their ordinary lives.

Oral history is both a research technique and a method of preserving history. It provides a method to research personal perspectives and gather detailed information on a wide range of subjects. It provides one way to uncover the kind of history that often goes unwritten.

As a method of historical and cultural documentation, oral history provides a way to preserve the kind of verbal information and storytelling which has existed since before recorded history. This documentation process first began with audio tape recordings by the Federal Writers' Project in the 1930s and 1940s, and now makes use of modern digital audio and video technology.



How can oral history be used?

Oral history can be used to study just about any subject or branch of history you can imagine. You just have to find the right people and ask the right questions. Personal interviews can be used to discover a perspective not found anywhere else, or to track social, cultural and other issues that were never documented.

Oral history can be used to research social history, cultural history, political history, military history, community history, and economic/business history. Some familiar examples include the documentaries of Ken Burns (such as 'Jazz'), Stephen Ambrose's books (such as *D-Day* and *Band of Brothers*), and books on local history (such as Ed Okonowicz's *Disappearing Delmarva*).



Evaluating oral history as a source

Once an oral history project is completed, you will need to evaluate the accuracy and value of the information that has been gathered. For a long time, historians trained to use written records dismissed oral history as overly biased and inaccurate.

Oral history cannot be used without considering the potential problems inherent to the information, just as written documents should be analyzed for the same weaknesses. The historian Judith Moyer asks these questions:

- *What of the failings of human memory?
- *What of the human tendency to impose a narrative structure on events that may not be closely connected?
- *What of the self-serving motives of the story teller?
- *What of the power relationships between the interviewer and interviewee that affect what and how events are reported?
- *What of the differences between the spoken and written word?
- *What of the inaccuracies that creep into meaning when trying to put a conversation onto paper?

Moyer concludes that written records can have the same problems: “Written sources can carry personal or social biases. Written sources occur within a social context....Even historical analysis published by professional historians...still falls short of that elusive goal, a complete and totally objective account of events.”

In short, oral history must be used as carefully as any other document in the research process. It requires analysis and interpretation, but it offers a new world of information. The spread of oral history as a research technique and a documentary process has “democratized” the historical record to include groups such as women, minorities and common people, giving a more inclusive and accurate view of the past.



Planning and conducting an oral history project

Choosing a topic and a theme

The process of discovering a topic for an oral history-based research project is similar to any other research project, except that the time frame for your topic is limited to living memory (unless you plan to use archived interviews). Explore potential topics by browsing through books, doing internet research or watching documentaries. Consider what aspects of your potential topics involve personal information or perspectives not readily found in typical sources, information you might gather in a personal interview. Choose a topic that genuinely interests you, which is essential to making your interviewees feel that their time and story are valued.

Sometimes the interview candidate(s) help you to discover a topic, rather than the other way around. You may know or be introduced to someone with a fascinating story to tell. With a little investigation and/or after talking to this person, you may identify other individuals to interview on the same topic. If a topic develops in this manner, it may be advisable to do a short interview (or pre-interview by telephone), and then narrow your topic and develop a targeted set of questions.

Write a statement that identifies the focus of your project (a “controlling purpose”). This will become the basis for the set of interview questions you will write. While your overall topic may be broad, it will help you establish a context for the more specific questions you will ask.

Example: The purpose of the Cecil County Veterans Oral History Project is to document the personal stories of veterans, their wartime experiences and their impressions of home before and after the war.

Planning your documentation

Your method of documentation depends upon the final product you have in mind. If you would like to create a documentary-style movie, you will need to record your interview on video. If you plan to develop a PowerPoint-type presentation with audio, you will want to collect photographs and documents along with audio recordings. Any presentation that will include live audio (such as an NPR-style radio broadcast) or that documents music or other oral traditions will need to be high in quality and easy to edit, using digital rather than analog (tape recorder) recordings.

If you plan a video presentation, you should collect video recordings from the beginning and work with a partner. Do not make the mistake of conducting audio interviews and then going back to “reinterview” to get the footage you need. It may signal to your interviewees that you do not value your time. Also, the interviewee is far less likely to act naturally. In order to get interesting and clear footage, you will need another person to act as videographer so that you are not distracted by the equipment or trying to have a conversation from behind a camera.

Plan to gather everything you need during one appointment. The interview meeting may be your one and only chance to conduct the interview, photograph the subject, and gather additional photographs and documents. If you would like to see photo albums, scrapbooks, etc., mention this in advance so that the interviewee has them ready. A follow-up appointment may not always be possible.

Identifying interview candidates

The best sources for interview candidates are people you know and your surrounding community. If you are still deciding on a topic, ask your family members or neighbors if they know anyone who has an interesting story to tell. Community organizations such as churches, service and veterans clubs, and volunteer fire departments often have members who may be potential interviewees or who know others in the area. Local libraries and historical societies often have staff or volunteers who are knowledgeable about individuals in the community.

Come up with a brief and non-threatening way to introduce yourself and your project. If possible, have a mutual acquaintance introduce you to the interview candidate or mention that person's name. You may choose to send a brief note explaining your project in advance of a phone call. Indicate your affiliation with a school or other institution, and clearly state the purpose of your project.

Example: My name is Susie Todd. Your neighbor, Joe Meyers, suggested you might be willing to talk to me about your involvement in the civil rights movement. I am a student at Bohemia Manor High School working on a research project and I really think your story would give me some great insights. Would you be willing to let me interview you?

Schedule a precise day and time at a place the interviewee feels comfortable; avoid public places. Many people are most comfortable meeting in their own homes. If possible, discourage a third person from sitting in on the interview who may talk or divert the conversation. Confirm the appointment a day or two ahead of time.

Developing a list of questions and conducting an interview

You will need to conduct some preliminary research to develop questions and prepare for the interview. While you do not need to know everything about a topic in advance, this research will allow you to ask intelligent questions. During your phone call to set up an interview, you might ask a few, "pre-interview" questions so you can better prepare ("Where were you living when you joined the fight for equal rights?").

First, identify your name, the date, the name of the interviewee, and where the recording is being made. Even if the interview is never transcribed, this information will identify the recording for a future researcher. After you record this information, and perhaps a few basic life history questions, stop the recorder to play it back and check for sound quality.

Start with basic life history questions. Do not forget to get biographical information such as when and where someone was born, where they grew up, how many brothers and sisters they had and what their parents did for a living. These basic life facts often affect people's choices for years. You might also ask names and dates that will outline the subjects in the interview from the beginning, and help you as you begin to ask questions.

Keep your questions simple and short and open-ended. An open-ended question does not have just a "yes" or "no" answer, it encourages a narrative. Use words and phrases like: "describe," "how," "what," "tell me about...," "set the scene..." and "then what happened..." Except for when you are looking for basic facts, a question should generate "essay" type answers.

Ask plenty of follow-up questions. Especially if the interviewee is giving short, one-word answers, draw them out by asking follow-up questions or rephrasing the same question. Let them know you are interested in the details, their side of the story, their opinion; some people are not used to that. A new question may occur to you during the interview, so do not be afraid to depart from your list. If you need to know more, keep asking questions before you move on ("I don't understand. Could you explain that in more detail?").

Write down your questions and add to them as the project progresses. Type or write your questions (or a list of phrases or topics) in a legible manner, on a single sheet of paper if possible. Do not flip through note cards or try to decipher confused notes during an interview. Keep your list of questions as a guide, but do not continually look at it, especially when you should be listening. Other important questions may occur to you after

you do an interview; add these to your list and eliminate others that do not prove useful. You might also list things to remember on your list of questions (Set the microphone to “on;” Stop and check to make sure the sound is good; Ask about photo albums; Don’t forget to take a picture!).

Take notes during the interview. This may be a notation of basic facts so that you can remember them for later on in the interview, or a topic that is raised that you might want to revisit later. You may learn the name of someone else to interview and will not want to wait until you transcribe so you can remember it. List and completely identify any photographs taken or other materials copied.

End with light conversation. Just as you should not begin with difficult, personal or emotionally-charged questions, do not abruptly end an intense interview. Finish up with some easy questions and by thanking the interviewee.

Sample questions:

What were the circumstances of you joining the service?

How did your family react to the news?

Describe what everyday life was like during your first few months in the service.

What were the circumstances of your first combat experience?

What is your most vivid memory of your wartime experience?

How did you adapt to civilian life after coming home?

What changes did you observe in your community after the war?

How do you feel your military service impacted your life and your career?



Interview strategies

An interview is a conversation, not a question-and-answer session. Your questions are a guideline, not a list to be followed word for word. Think of the interview as a conversation or an opportunity to get to know someone. Do not think of yourself as a reporter asking hard-hitting questions. This is why it is good to start out with life history questions to make the interviewee more comfortable. Ask one question at a time.

Be a good listener, but do not make repeated comments. This may be the hardest skill to master. Too often, recordings are peppered with “yes,” “hmmm” and “uh-huh,” disrupting the interviewee’s story and making the audio harder to use in a presentation. Force yourself to nod, shake your head, make eye contact or use other non-verbal feedback to let them know you are paying attention. Allow silence and give them time to think.

Do not skip over the details. Ask for definitions and explanations of words or terms that you may not understand. Also, be aware that your knowledge of a subject may lead you to skip certain questions or to make assumptions that are incorrect, and you may miss an important part of the story. Even though you may not be as interested in part of the interviewee’s life, if it comes in the course of other topics you want to cover, it may make sense to talk about it briefly. You may discover information or insights you did not expect.

Example: Presumption: All members of the 29th Division in World War II were volunteers so I don’t need to ask Mr. Bennett about how he joined the unit. Reality: Mr. Bennett joined the unit as a replacement after he was drafted and had a tough time becoming part of the group until his first combat experience.

Allow the interview to take a natural course. People do not necessarily think chronologically from birth to adulthood. They may have particular subjects on their mind that they would like to talk about first or may want to give you their “story.” After that, it is a good time to ask them to reflect on their experiences or give more detail about one aspect.

Do not be afraid to redirect the conversation. If your interviewee gets off-track, be sensitive to the fact that it may be something that is important to them (such as personal or family illness), even if it is not part of your focus. Try to be polite and listen for a short time, offer an appropriate comment to show that you are listening (“I’m so sorry you are going through that right now”) and gently try to change the subject. You may be able to transition

using the same topic (“Tell me about a time a family member was ill and it affected the running of the farm”), or it may be best to switch to something entirely different.

Do not let your personal opinion or bias get in the way. You may agree or disagree with the actions or life choices the interviewee talks about. Try to be objective and not let your opinion affect your demeanor. If you are asked for your opinion, say “I’m interested in what you did instead” or make an open-minded comment (Comment: “I suppose you think the war is a good idea?” Response: “Well, I realize that there are people with different opinions and I have to respect that.”) Remember that you are there as a historian or documentarian, not as a judge.

Limit the interview to 1-2 hours. Many people get tired or impatient after this time frame and you will find your own energy waning also. Ask if you can schedule a second or even third interview if they are still willing to talk and you would like to find out more.

If you are uncomfortable with interviewing, practice! Create an ideal interview setting and ask a friend or family member to help you practice. Pretend you are interviewing them (do not ask them to “be” someone else); you might find out something new about them!



Interview follow-up

Make sure you explain your project. Preferably before or after the interview, explain the purpose of your project, its goals and how the interview will be used. Encourage the interviewee to ask any questions. This will simplify getting formal permission to use the interview and help to prevent the interviewee from changing their mind about letting you use all or a portion of the interview.

The interviewee must sign a release form before you can use the interview. This is both to protect you and the interviewee. This document explains the purpose of the project and its potential uses, as well as how the interview may be archived in the long-term. (See Appendix for a template release form). Bring the form with you to the interview, and ask them to sign it before you leave.

Write a thank you note. Send a professional thank you letter conveying your appreciation and reaffirming the value of the interview to your project. Let them know if they will be able to see the final product and/or when it will be presented. Send the interviewee a copy of the release form for their records.

Analyze the interview and schedule a follow-up. Compare the interview with your research and the goals of your project to determine if you obtained the information you needed. If not, or if the interview suggested areas of further investigation, try to schedule a follow-up interview. If the interview was weak because of disorganization, make sure you prepare more thoroughly the next time.



Collecting documentary materials

A good interviewer will collect at least some documentary materials. At minimum, this would include at least two photographs of the interviewee. You will certainly want copies of documents and photographs that relate to the topic and/or time period your interview covers.

Plan to copy materials the day of the interview, or ask to borrow them that day. If you decide you need photographs for your project later on, you may not be able to reach the interviewee or the materials may be in storage or may have been lent to someone else. If you have a digital camera and good photography skills, you could take digital photographs of originals. You may also ask to borrow the materials for copying or scanning, but be aware that some people are uncomfortable lending out these precious personal records. If you do borrow materials, make sure you return them in a timely manner.

Identify and log all materials. Ask the interviewee to identify all photographs and give you the source of printed materials (such as newspaper clippings). You will need to take detailed notes on this, and then record the information in the log along with the interview index (see explanation below and Appendix for a template). Assign each photograph (or digital file) a number which you also write on the back of the photo (John Smith photo #1, #2, etc.)

Transcription and indexing

Transcription and indexing are the most time-consuming part of the interview process. Transcription is the process of typing word for word both the questions and the answers from your interview into a word processing program on a computer. Indexing involves noting various topics covered in the interview according to when it appears on the recording, enabling the researcher to pinpoint the location of the topic.

Be aware that for each hour of recorded interview, FOUR to SIX hours are usually required for transcription. This of course depends on the speed of the typist, the clarity of the recording and how fast the interviewee speaks. You should also allow time for taking notes for the index.

Most digital recording devices allow you to input the audio files into your computer for easier transcribing. The devices often come with software that allows you to advance and rewind the recording using keyboard strokes or the mouse; a foot pedal also can be separately purchased. The software can be used to perform simple editing (such as minutes of dead air when an interview ends) or to slow down the recording if it is difficult to hear. Older analog audio tapes are transcribed using a Dictaphone machine operated with a foot pedal; the text is typed into a word processing program.

Try to transcribe the way people talk. What does NOT come through in a transcript is the way a person talks, their body language and their local dialect. Often, people speak in sentence fragments or thoughts and do not always use proper English. Do NOT correct this language in the transcript, but try to use ellipses and dashes to reflect the natural pattern of speech.

Make notations within the interview. Sometimes the person interviewed gets their facts or dates confused; you may correct or clarify this in brackets or a footnote. Sometimes there are pauses or side conversations that interrupt the interview; note “phone ringing” or “dog barking” in brackets. If the interviewee gets emotional or laughs, you may choose to make a note of this in brackets (See Appendix for sample transcript).

Identify the interview in the transcript. Identify the name of the interviewee and date of the interview on the first page. Explain any abbreviations you are using (such as first and last initial) to indicate who is speaking. At the bottom, number the pages of the interview and include the total number of pages in case the pages become separated (example: John Smith interview, page 1 of 35, etc.).

Indexing is part of the transcription process. The transcriptionist should make notes of the time on the recording and the topic discussed for the index. This may be done by hand on a notepad and later typed into a legible interview log (see Appendix for Interview Log template).

Equipment

It is vital that you have good, working equipment. Modern technology has made high-quality audio and video recording equipment easily accessible and relatively inexpensive. Most importantly, you need to know how to properly use your equipment (or work with someone who does, in the case of video). Always record your interviews in some manner. No matter how good you are at taking notes, there will always be something you will miss, whether it is the exact way a person expresses themselves or an important piece of information.

Digital audio/voice recorders

Digital audio has become the least expensive way to record high-quality sound. Most of these recorders are small enough to fit in your hand and contain sensitive built-in microphones.

External business microphones are an excellent add-on and allow you to sit at a more comfortable distance from the interviewee. Some recorders come with built-in memory (as much as 1300 minutes) or use removable media such as memory sticks which can greatly increase the number of minutes you can store.

Whether you choose built-in memory or removable memory, be sure to choose a model that allows you to connect by USB cable to your computer so that you can transfer your files to the computer for transcription and to make copies on CDs.

Analog tape recorders

Analog tape recorders (including reel-to-reel tape) were the gold standard of the past. Today, many libraries and archives have analog audio tapes in their collections and these have proven not to deteriorate quickly.

The types of high-quality recorders oral historians once used (and some still use) cost hundreds of dollars. You can record an adequate interview with a standard tape recorder with an external microphone, but it will not compare to digital sound. If you do use such a recorder, buy 60-minute tapes since 90-minute or longer tapes are physically thinner and more likely to break. Built-in microphones are rarely sensitive enough, so you will need to purchase a good-quality external microphone.

Do not use micro-cassette recorders, since the tapes are not usable in other machines and are not of very good quality.

Digital camcorders

If you want to create a video-based presentation, there is no substitute for digital camcorders and video editing software such as iMovie (for Macintosh computers) and Ulead DVD Moviefactory, Adobe Premiere Elements or Roxio Videowave (for Windows-based computers). Some of these software programs also allow you to input and edit older analog video recordings.

Consider the format you will need to create your presentation before deciding on which technology to use. Of course, your presentation may be determined by the type of camcorder you have available. In either case, you will want to work with a partner who will be your videographer. This should be someone who is comfortable with the equipment and who will be a minimal presence during the interview.

You may find that people who are willing to be interviewed on audio will be uncomfortable with a camcorder, so make sure you let them know you will be using a video recorder before the interview.

Helpful hints

Test the equipment in advance. Practice using the recording device and play the recording back to ensure that the audio and/or video sound quality will be good. The night or morning before an interview, check battery levels and that you have all your supplies packed.

Bring necessary supplies such as batteries, power cords, film, tapes, microphones, a tripod, questions, release form pen/pencil and paper. It is very embarrassing to have to reschedule an interview because your batteries are dead.

Create a quiet environment. Constant background noise can dramatically affect the quality of a recording. Request that a noisy pet be placed outside or in another room, ask to turn off the TV or turn down the air conditioning.

After you record introductions, check that the equipment is working properly. You may need to place the microphone on a book to reduce vibration noise or ask the interviewee to move closer. You might have to remind them to speak more slowly or loudly if your equipment has limitations.



Archiving your work

With all of the work that you have put into your research and interview, you should make plans to archive your work. If other researchers are to make use of your interview, it is important that you have followed the steps outlined in this guide so that the interview is easily accessible. Most importantly, you should have obtained a signed release form and at least completed an index of the subjects in your interview, if not a complete transcription. Be sure to list all photographs and other materials collected, and identify them on the hard copy (see Interview Log).

If you want your interview to be accessible, you should take the time to transcribe. In this way, your audio or video document becomes a written document as well. Although many researchers may be intrigued by an audio interview, they often do not have the time to listen to hours of tape and prefer to scan an index or browse through a transcript.

You may choose to save your own research for future use, or look for a suitable place to donate. If yours is a local subject, inquire at a local historical society or library to see if they maintain an oral history collection or would be interested in your interview. Subjects more national in scope may fit in better at another institution, such as a college or university that specializes in the subject matter.



Final products

Once the interview process is completed, you will need to develop your final product or presentation. There are many different ways the information you have gathered can be interpreted and presented, several of which are described below:

Video documentary: This format would compile excerpts from your videotaped interviews, commentary and footage of printed materials to create a thematic documentary.

PowerPoint presentation: In this type of presentation, slides of documentary materials and photographs could be used along with interpretive text and audio excerpts supporting a thesis.

Radio broadcast: This NPR-type audio presentation would include introductory information and interpretive commentary, along with appropriate portions of your audio interviews.

Interactive exhibition: This can be much more than a poster presentation. A small, museum-type exhibition might include text panels with interpretive text, photos and graphics, along with written or push-button audio excerpts from interviews. Interactive components might invite the viewer to match faces with stories or create a vignette setting that offers an interpretive window onto the topic.

Dramatic presentation or reenactment: Using the actual words of an interviewee, the presenter could adopt one or more personas in order to present a dramatic interpretation of their topic.

Photo essay: This kind of interpretation could combine the words of interviewees with a series of photographs that document the places, events, and people that are the focus of the presentation.

Non-traditional research paper: An ordinary research paper can become extraordinary if it adopts a “behind-the-scenes” approach to a major event or a “window” to interpreting an aspect of culture or everyday life. A storytelling approach might enable a topic often studied at a distance to “come to life.”

Interpretive booklet or “newspaper:” This kind of booklet might be similar in content to a traditional research paper, except that it would incorporate photographs, documents, side articles and graphics for a more visually interesting presentation. A variation on this idea would be to create a fake newspaper or news magazine focused on the chosen topic, making use of quotations, photographs and other various materials.



Appendix

For Further Information

Books:

Allen, Barbara and Lynwood Montell. *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981.

Baron, Robert and Nicholas R. Spitzer, ed. *Public Folklore*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.

Bartis, Peter. *Folklife and Fieldwork: A Layman's Introduction to Field Techniques*. Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1990.

Baum, Willa K. *Oral History for the Local Historical Society*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1987.

Buckendorf, Madeline and Laurie Mercer. *Using Oral History in Community History Projects*. Pamphlet Series #4. Albuquerque: Oral History Association, 1992.

Frisch, Michael. *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991.

Grele, Ronald J. *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*. New York: Praeger, 1991.

Ives, Edward D. *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Field Workers in Folklore and Oral History*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1980.

Jackson, Bruce. *Fieldwork*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Kammen, Carol. *On Doing Local History: Reflections on What Local Historians Do, Why, and What it Means*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1986.

Kyvig, David E. and Myron A. Marty. *Nearby History: Exploring the Past Around you*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1982.

Lanman, Barry A. and George L. Mehaffy. *Oral History in the Secondary School Classroom*. Pamphlet #2. Los Angeles: Oral History Association, 1989.

Maryland Historical Trust. *'Get it While You Can: One-day Workshops on Documenting Local Cultural Traditions*. Crownsville, MD; Maryland Historical Trust, 1994.

Schorzman, Terri A., ed. *A Practical Introduction to Videohistory: The Smithsonian Institution and Alfred P. Sloan Experiment*. Melbourne: Krieger Publishing Co., 1993.

Transcribing and Editing Local History. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1991.



Websites:

American Association for State and Local History: www.aaslh.org

American Folklife Center, Library of Congress: <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>

American Life Histories, Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940, Library of Congress, American Memory:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaintro/wpahome.html>

Archives of American Art, Oral History Collections, Smithsonian Institution, Archives of American Art:

<http://www.archivesofamericanart.si.edu/oralhist/oralhist.htm>

Civil Rights in Mississippi Digital Archive, McCain Library and Archive, University of Southern Mississippi:

<http://www.lib.usm.edu/~spcol/crda/index.html>

Delaware Agricultural Museum and Village, Dover, Delaware; Oral History Collection:

www.agriculturalmuseum.org

Delaware Heritage Commission Oral History Program: <http://www.state.de.us/heritage/oralhist.shtml>

Delaware State Archives, Dover, Delaware: <http://www.state.de.us/sos/dpa/collections/collections.shtml>

"How To: Resources for Planning and Conducting Oral History Interviews,"

Southern Oral History Program (SOHP) University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Southern Historical Collection:

<http://www.sohp.org/howto/index.html>

Kent State University *May 4 Collection*: <http://www.library.kent.edu/exhibits/4may95/>

Maryland Historical Society Oral History Collection: <http://www.mdhs.org/explore/library/FindOralHistories.html>

Maryland Historical Trust Cultural Conservation Program: <http://www.marylandhistoricaltrust.net/index2.html>

Oral History Association: <http://www.dickinson.edu/oha/>

Oral History in the Mid-Atlantic Region: <http://www.ohmar.org/>

Step-by-Step Guide to Oral History by www.dohistory.org

http://www.dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html

Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938, Library of Congress, American Memory

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/snhtml/snhome.html>

University of Delaware Special Collections: <http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/guides/oral.htm>

Women in Journalism, Washington Press Club Foundation:

<http://npc.press.org/wpforal/ohhome.htm>





The Historical Society of Cecil County

135 East Main Street
 Elkton, Maryland 21921
 410-398-1790
 e-mail: history@cchistory.org



ORAL HISTORY RELEASE

I, _____ agree to be interviewed as part of a research project by the below named Cecil County Public School student. I understand that each individual student is conducting research as part of their classroom instruction, and are not working under the express direction of the Cecil County Board of Education or the Historical Society of Cecil County. As part of their project, students will also be collecting audio and/or video oral histories, along with related documentary materials (such as photographs and manuscripts). I give my permission for these materials to be used by the students in their research project and related presentations, including audio, video, computer, dramatic, visual, written and other formats.

Furthermore, I agree that if the interview and related materials are deemed appropriate, they *may* be preserved in the permanent collections of the Historical Society of Cecil County and may be used for scholarly and educational purposes, including exhibition, publication, presentation on the World Wide Web and for promotion of the Historical Society and its activities. Therefore, I hereby grant, convey and transfer to the Historical Society of Cecil County, all my rights, title, interest in and to my testimony recorded on _____ 2 ___ along with any photographs or written materials produced as a result of this project. I grant my consent for any photographs provided by me or taken of me as part of this project to be used, published and copied by the Historical Society of Cecil County in any medium. I agree that the Historical Society may use my name, photographic image, statements and voice reproduction without further approval on my part.

CHECK ONE:

_____ I agree that my interview and related materials (as described above) may be used by the below-named Cecil County Public School student AND they may be preserved in the permanent collections of the Historical Society of Cecil County to be used for scholarly and educational purposes as listed above.

_____ I agree that my interview and related materials (as described above) may be used ONLY by the below-named Cecil County Public School student.

 Signature of Interviewee

Date: _____

 Printed name

 Telephone

 Address (Street and/or P.O. Box)

 Signature of Student

 City, State, Zip Code

Date: _____

Sample Transcript

John Smith Interview
Date: 10 December 2005
Location: Elkton, Maryland

JJ: Jane Jones, Interviewer
JS: John Smith

JJ: This is Jane Jones. It is Saturday, December 10th, 2005. I am in Elkton, Maryland. And your full name is, sir?

JS: John Smith.

JJ: And would you tell me your date of birth?

JS: July 17th, 1922.

JJ: O.k. Tell me about the place you were born?

JS: I was born on a farm outside of Elkton. My father raised corn and vegetables and...excuse me [coughing] we had dairy cows.

JJ: Where exactly was the farm?

JS: It was located up on Appleside [Appleton] Road.

JJ: What did your mother do to help out on the farm?

JS: Well, when I was eight, my mother...[becoming emotional] passed away from pneumonia.

JJ: How horrible! I imagine that must have been very difficult for the whole family. How were the children cared for after that?

Interview Log

Name of interviewee: _____

Name of interviewer: _____

Birth date: _____

Subject(s) of interview: _____

Recording format:

Digital audio (memory card) _____ Other (specify) _____

Date of recording: _____ Location: _____

Length of interview (minutes): _____ Number of CDs: _____

Date master CD(s) created: _____ Date backup CD(s) created: _____

Location of CDs: _____

Related documentary materials:

Number of photographs: _____ Format (digital and/or print): _____

Location of photographs: _____

Description of photographs:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Number of written materials: _____ Location: _____

1. _____
2. _____

Transcription:

Date of transcription: _____ Number of pages: _____

Location of hard copy: _____ Location of disc copy: _____

Summary of topics in order on the recording:

Time (min.) Topic

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