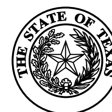
FUNDAMENTALS OF ORAL HISTORY

TEXAS PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

RANCHER, PRESIDIO COUNTY/ TxDOT

The real record of history is found in the lives of the ordinary people who lived it. Collecting, preserving and sharing oral histories not only transmits knowledge from one generation to the next, it enhances our understanding of the past by illuminating personal experience.



TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

The State Agency for Historic Preservation

WHAT ORAL HISTORY IS AND WHAT IT ISN'T

The real record of history is found in the lives of ordinary people who lived it.

Before beginning an oral history project, a researcher should understand the advantages and disadvantages of oral history research, as well as what it is and what it isn't. Oral history is the collection and recording of personal memoirs as historical documentation. It documents forms of discourse normally not documented and it emphasizes the significance of human experience. Oral history is normally not the best method for obtaining factual data, such as specific dates, places or times, because people rarely remember such detail accurately. More traditional historical research methods — courthouse records, club minutes, newspaper accounts — are best for specifics. Oral history is the best method to use, however, to get an idea not only of what happened, but what past times meant to people and how it felt to be a part of those times.

Many people use the term oral history interchangeably with oral tradition, but the two are not the same. Oral tradition is a body of narratives passed down verbally from generation to generation beyond the lifetime of any one individual. It includes stories, songs, sayings, memorized speeches and traditional accounts of past events. Oral history, on the other hand, involves eyewitness accounts and reminiscences about events and experiences which occurred during the lifetime of the person being interviewed.

An oral history interview should focus on personal memories and not on hearsay or folk tradition. In practice, however, these often merge because oral history is storytelling. When we ask people to talk about the past, we are asking them to tell us stories from memory. When they do, they often select and emphasize certain features while minimizing others. People do this to personalize their stories for the listener, to make the story relevant to today, or to make sense of their experiences. It is human nature to use stories to explain things. Interviewers should be aware of this process of story making — the decision-making involved in telling a story and the conditions that determine it.

In addition to providing an added dimension to historical research, an oral history project can:

- foster appreciation for little-known or rapidly vanishing ways of life;
- verify the historicity of events which cannot be determined by traditional methods of historical research;
- correct stereotypical images of lifeways and people;
- and recover and preserve important aspects of a human experience that would otherwise go undocumented.

Collecting, preserving and sharing oral histories not only transmits knowledge from one generation to the next, it enhances our understanding of the past by illuminating personal experience.

BEGINNING AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

SET YOUR PARAMETERS

Every oral history project needs parameters to provide a clear understanding of who to interview and what topics to cover. The more focused a project, the easier it is to get the unique stories that together compose broader themes of history. While the natural tendency is to interview as many people as possible, this approach tends to overwhelm all available resources, including time, manpower and money.

In oral history, less is often better; a well-planned and reasoned approach will more likely result in more in-depth interviews, better use of the information, and ultimately, greater preservation of history. One way to focus oral history projects is to determine the type of histories you want to record. There are four basic types of oral history projects: life histories, topical histories, thematic studies and site/artifact specific research.

Life histories are interviews with individuals about their backgrounds from childhood to adulthood. While most follow a chronology, there is opportunity to discuss a variety of subjects based on the interviewer's interests and the interviewee's remembered

experiences and perspectives. Life histories are ideal for family research, as well as for certain aspects of community and social histories.

Topical histories are often used for focused studies of particular events, eras or organizations. Examples include the Great Depression in Dumas, the Waco tornado of 1953 or Cotulla High School in the 1960s. Despite the relatively narrow focus of such projects, they provide latitude for exploration within the general topic. An oral study of the impact of World War II in a specific locale, for example, might include interviews about military involvement, civil defense preparedness, the home front, rationing, bond and scrap metal drives, war industries and a myriad of related topics. Even seemingly broad topics, such as early life in a county, can be broken down into smaller, more manageable portions and cover select topics like foodways, housing, health care, education, entertainment, politics and customs.

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While most projects center on life histories or topical histories, two other kinds of projects can, with imagination and creativity, prove equally rewarding. The first features a thematic approach to history, with information gathered about broad patterns and concepts. These themes could include topics such as love, conflict, hope, religion, education, competition, success or art. Thematic oral history projects are not common, but they present opportunities worth considering.

Another underutilized form of oral history is the documentation of specific artifacts or sites. Oral history may be used, for example, to explain items within a museum collection — how to churn butter, how to operate a Farmall F-12 tractor, how to use a Victrola, how to dress for travel in the 1940s. Another method is to have a subject orally document the history of an individual home, a particular street, an old schoolhouse, a vacant field or an overgrown cotton patch.

Regardless of the type of project you choose, the same basic concerns come first: Who do I interview and where do I find them?

LOCATING INTERVIEWEES

Finding subjects to interview is often determined by the scope of the project. If, for example, you are

interested in family history, you may already know who to interview. Or, if you select a narrowly-focused topic, perhaps only a few possible interviewees can tell the story. If your topic is broad, such as the Great Depression or World War II, the pool of contacts may be overwhelming. The problem then is not the availability of sources, but how to select the best ones.

To choose the most appropriate subjects, first try to break the broader topic into smaller subjects that naturally limit the possibilities. With the Great Depression, for example, you might identify individuals who worked in New Deal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps or the Works Progress Administration. Or, you might interview people who rode the rails in search of jobs or worked in soup kitchens.

Whether the scope of the project is broad or narrow, you want to identify the best possible interviewees. Oral historians employ a number of standard techniques to help:

Ask for Referrals

Begin your informant search by asking several knowledgeable individuals for their recommendations. In other words, based on their personal knowledge or understanding of the topic, who do they know who has the firsthand information you are seeking? Ask as many people as possible and get as many names as you can. Eventually, patterns will emerge, and certain names will be repeated. Meet with those individuals, invest some time in telling them about the project and make a determination based on your instincts. If you are still not sure, conduct a brief interview with each about a specific aspect of your project to see who offers the most potential.

Use Questionnaires

Prepare a set of questions about the nature of the oral history project and circulate it as widely as possible, perhaps through the assistance of local organizations and businesses. The questions should be basic; the purpose of the form is to identify individuals to contact later, not to compile extensive answers. The opening questions might be very focused:

- Did you pick cotton in the Burton area in the days before tractors? What years? Where did your family live? Did they rent or own the land?
- Did you work in an El Paso boot factory? Which one? When?
- Was your family displaced by the construction of Fort Hood? What do you remember about the relocation?
- Did you ever hear Bob Wills perform in person? What were the circumstances?

Follow-up questions can provide more detail, but avoid using the questions you may use in the actual interviews. Remember to use the questionnaire to ask about other potential interviewees.

Do Background Research

In the natural haste to get oral histories recorded, research is often overlooked. But no project should begin without some basic investigation of available historical resources. Old newspapers, county histories, archival records, cemeteries and photographs can provide material that may eventually lead to the names of interviewees. If not, the information will provide valuable background for questioning.

Get the Word Out

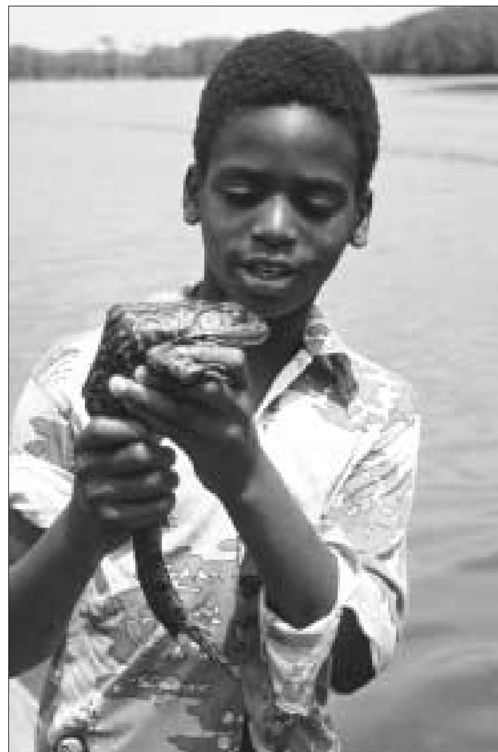
Publicity often generates names of interviewees, so make an effort to let people know about the project. Time spent on news releases, articles and giving talks to local civic and religious groups can be very productive. Be sure to define the topic clearly, explain the purpose of the project and include a call for scrapbooks, photographs, volunteers or interviewees.

Once you select an oral history topic and begin to identify interviewees, remember these important points. First, try to be comprehensive and inclusive. Analyze the topic from various perspectives and then identify individuals who can tell you all sides of the story. If your topic is cotton production, for example, you can interview field hands, sharecroppers, bankers, brokers, gin and cottonseed oil mill workers, farm families, tractor salesmen, teachers, politicians, preachers and anyone else who has a unique perspective on the role cotton played in the community. Most stories cross many lines within a community, and a good project attempts to tell a complete history.

Next, as you search for the people who can tell a story, avoid the tendency to interview only old-timers about the distant past. Remember that today's events

represent tomorrow's past. Take time to record the present, to learn about the perspectives of today and to take "oral snapshots" of individuals' lives and communities for the benefit of those to come. Involve young people, both as interviewers and as interviewees. Try to preserve stories and ideas that will prove educational to future generations. Be careful not to overlook history while you are searching through the past.

Finally, another important point to remember, but one which is sometimes overlooked, is to make sure the interviewee has firsthand knowledge of the subject. While stories handed down from others might be of interest, and while the research compiled by an individual, such as the town historian, may be helpful, the true impact of oral history comes through personal memory. The objective should always be the stories of those who experienced the history. This personal side of oral history is what makes it different from other methods of historical research.



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SELECTING INTERVIEWERS

Choose Interviewers with Care

In most oral history projects, people spend more time locating interviewees than selecting the right interviewers. Both need careful consideration, because a good oral history interview is often the result of a rapport or a bond that develops between the two principals. Such rapport is born of respect, understanding, shared experiences or interests and a mutual appreciation for the lessons of the past.

It sounds simple, but if an interviewer is not interested in the topic or in the reminiscences of the interviewee, someone else should conduct the oral history session. Interviewers must show a genuine interest in the history being recorded. The lack of interest or sincerity cannot be disguised and the quality of the project may suffer as a result.

Be Sensitive to Differences — Make the Most of Them

In oral history, as in life, there are natural gaps, or differences, between people. Age, religion, politics, geography, economics, gender, language and education are some of the most common differences. Others are more subtle and perhaps limiting to oral history. It is the role of the oral historian to identify and acknowledge existing gaps and to take steps to minimize their negative impact, while also making

the differences work to the advantage of the project. Gaps between people can prove beneficial, especially if the interviewer is not afraid to ask for definitions, elaboration or detailed explanations.

To bridge the gaps, you can employ research to learn more about the topics under review, as well as about the life of the interviewee. Interviewers should learn to listen and appreciate the responses, even when what they hear differs markedly from their own beliefs and experiences. A good investigator uses the differences between people to get more information and to identify terms that are not widely understood.

A word of caution about gaps in experience, however. Although they might influence the outcome of an interview — in both positive and negative ways — they should not be minimized. It is possible for an interviewer to be so close to the interviewee or to the topic of study that the resulting information lacks depth, detail and insight. In such instances, even though the two principals may have a mutual understanding of a story, its true relevance may be lost on future researchers. Remember the audience, define terms, avoid inside information and terms, and ask for explanations, even when you might know the answer. Your frame of reference and your life experiences may not be the same as those who will benefit from the oral history in a century, or even a decade.

One last reminder. Do not be discouraged if the interview does not turn out as good as you anticipated. Not everyone is a good interviewee, just as not everyone is a natural interviewer. Every session increases your understanding of the subject and increases your experiences as an interviewer. Plus, each oral history preserves another part of our collective past.

CHOOSING RECORDING EQUIPMENT

A dependable, moderately priced recorder with a good external microphone can produce great oral history interviews. Expensive equipment is not necessary unless you plan to use your tapes for radio or television productions. Remember to keep things simple so you can focus your attention on the *interview* and not on the equipment. Here are some features to look for in equipment:

■ Find a recorder that allows you to see the tape as it is recording. Some recorders cover the tape area with a dark plastic or leather casing, which makes it difficult to check the amount of tape left while conducting an interview.

■ A recording/battery indicator light provides peace of mind during the interview because you can glance at the light to see if the machine is recording.

■ Always use an external microphone; that is, one that plugs into the recorder. Internal mikes rarely produce good recordings because they tend to be too weak and often pick up the sound of the recorder itself. Table mikes or lapel mikes are fine. With a table mike, you can purchase a stand or make one yourself out of packing foam or by propping the mike in a cup or on a towel.

■ Select a recorder that can use both batteries and electricity as power sources, since this feature allows more flexibility during an interview. Electricity is more reliable than batteries, but always bring a long extension cord because you never know where the outlet will be.

■ Cassette tapes are inexpensive and commonly available, but it pays to use good quality, name-brand tapes. You do not need the most expensive ones on the market — expensive tapes usually offer a wider range of sound, which is nice for music but not necessary when recording the human voice.

Use 60 (30 minutes on each side) or 90 minute (45 minutes on each side) cassettes. Longer tapes are too thin and tend to bleed, stretch or tear.

It is a good idea to use cassettes that are put together with tiny screws in each corner instead of glue, because if the tape jams or breaks, the case can be opened, the tape repaired and the case put back together again. Using tapes without screws, you have to destroy the case to get to the tape.

CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Before the Interview

People are often reluctant to be interviewed because they do not understand what you want from them or because they feel that they will not be able give you what you want. Many feel that the interview will require a performance on their part. When possible, make contact with subjects through a personal meeting or by telephone so you can explain your project and answer any questions. Make it clear why you

wish to interview them and why their story is important to your research. You may wish to introduce the idea in a letter to the interviewee before you contact them by phone or in person.

Let individuals choose the time of day that is best for them. Allow two full hours for the interview. You want interviewees who have set aside the time and are prepared to do their best, without interruptions. If possible, let them choose the place as well. Homes are nice because the subject is usually comfortable there and often has photos and other memorabilia that can enhance the interview. However, some people prefer to be interviewed elsewhere. If you do not have a good interview location, see if you can find a local place to use — the conference room of the local bank, a study carrel in the public library, or a room in a church, for example. The day before the interview, call the interviewee to remind him or her about your appointment.

Setting Up the Interview

When you first arrive at the interview site, briefly explain again the purpose of your project and answer any questions the interviewee may have. Create a relaxed and pleasant atmosphere for the setting. Be flexible enough with your equipment so that the interviewee can sit where he or she will be most comfortable. Chat while you set up your equipment. You might take photos or other items with you to discuss beforehand as an ice-breaker.

Choose as quiet a spot as possible. Keep in mind that the noises which we have learned to filter out — traffic, air conditioners and fans, television and radio — the equipment will record. You may not be able to control all of these factors, but try to minimize competing noise levels as much as possible. For example, if you are interviewing someone in August and the air conditioner is going full blast, you must decide which is more important, the noise level on the recorder or being able to sit comfortably and talk for two hours. In this case, the best you might do is to move a bit further from the air conditioner and to move the microphone a bit closer to the interviewee.

Always place the microphone as close to the interviewee as practical. Set up the equipment and do a quick test to ensure everything is working. Then, try to forget the equipment and focus on the interview itself.

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The Interview Session

Begin each session by recording an oral "label" on each tape that you use. Start with a general introduction, including your name, the date, the location, name of the person being interviewed, name of the group sponsoring the project (if any) and a brief statement of purpose (see examples). This assures that, even if the written label is lost or ruined, anyone who listens to the tape will know what it is about.

Begin the session by asking warm-up questions that you feel the interviewee can easily answer. This builds the confidence of the interviewee so he or she can relax and enjoy the session. For example, it is usually safe to start out asking the subject to tell you a little bit about where he or she was born and raised. In general, use traditional conversation skills — listen attentively, encourage storytelling, do not interrupt and follow the pace of the interviewee rather than your own.

Ask simple, open-ended questions first. These are questions that direct the interviewee to a topic but leave the range of possible responses wide open. For example, "Tell me what life was like here before they built the dam." Open-ended questions enable the interviewee to decide what is most important to discuss and therefore encourage them to tell stories rather than merely relate factual data. The range of possible responses is large and you have not steered the interviewee into responding in any one direction. Later you can ask follow-up questions to fill in the details.

Avoid leading questions. Leading questions suggest to the interviewee how you would like them to respond. An example is, "I guess it was really depressing around here before they built the dam, wasn't it?" Instead, try to ask open-ended questions.

Try not to ask questions that only require a "yes" or "no" answer. These do not help you obtain the fullest stories for your research. Instead of asking, "So, was school integration good for the community?" you could ask, "What was the impact of school integration on the community?" As you begin asking detailed follow-up questions, you may find it necessary to use yes/no questions, but avoid them in the early stages of exploring a topic.

You should thoroughly prepare for the interview, including creating an outline. Bring the outline with you, but do not let it restrict the interview. Do not be afraid of a little rambling. Allow time for responses to run their course and be open to pursuing a new topic if it is introduced, even if it is not on your outline. If the interview gets too far off course, gently steer back to the topic with something like "I want to know more about bass fishing, so perhaps we can talk about it later, but right now, could you help me understand what was happening in your town before they built the dam?"

Ask for concrete illustrations and examples. If someone says, for example, "The mayor never supported an idea that wasn't her own," then ask, "Could you give me an example of that?" Not only does this add depth and illustration to the material you are collecting, it also requires the interviewee to be specific and to qualify sweeping statements.

As a general rule, do not challenge accounts you think may be inaccurate. If you must challenge something, try to put the onus of disagreement onto a third party rather than yourself: "So, you are saying that the Red Cross provided no help for the flood victims? Some people have said that they got there first and stayed the longest to help. Why would they say that?" This method also works when asking questions of a sensitive nature. For example, if you want to find out if your interviewee experienced racial discrimination, one approach is to ask, "Did you ever hear of any instances of racial discrimination in this neighborhood?" This approach allows subjects to discuss a sensitive issue from a distance, personalizing it only if they so choose.

The approach to sensitive questions discussed in the preceding paragraph is an example of a general rule in oral history interviewing: Allow the interviewee to set the limits of what they will and will not talk about. Oral history interviewing is not television's *60 Minutes.* It is neither a courtroom grill session nor a hard-hitting confrontational interview like that used by the news media. This marks an important distinction in interview style.

There are times, of course, when you need to challenge the responses of an interviewee and the third-party approach does not work. In that case, it might be best to save the challenge for the end of the interview. If the challenge breaks the rapport, at least the interview is practically over, and by then you may

find that you have built enough rapport to get an honest answer.

Another alternative to challenging an interviewee's response is to try the question from several different angles. For example, if you receive no response to the question, "What was the attitude of the rest of the historical society towards your idea to preserve the old Spanish missions?" you might wait a little while and try it again from another direction: "What were the priorities of the historical society that year?" "Was preservation of the missions on their list?" "Why not?" Very often subjects don't answer a question because they don't fully understand it or because they are thinking about other things they want to say. It is always a good idea to rephrase the question and try again.

Try to figure out how the interviewee's memory works. This is one of the more challenging and rewarding aspects of doing oral histories. Memories vary. Psychologists tell us that many people remember things visually, so you might want to ask questions that tap into that: "Thinking back to that day in May, when you stood on your front porch and watched the water rise, can you describe for me what it looked like?" Many people are very orderly and think chronologically; others need names of people, places or incidents to trigger their memories, which is why preliminary research pays off, especially with regard to names and places.

Do not be afraid of silence. Give subjects time to collect their thoughts and answer fully. Also, give yourself time to phrase your questions.

Before turning off the recorder, ask one last — very important — question: "Is there anything I haven't asked that you think I should know?" This gives interviewees an opportunity to say things that you might not have thought to ask or to discuss something they were waiting to be asked. It also allows them the opportunity to contribute to your research by providing more materials or information, such as leads on others you could interview.

Concluding the Interview

Sometimes it can be difficult to conclude an interview. Very often the interviewee wishes to keep talking. Even so, keep the interview time to under two hours. The exception is when you have only one opportunity to talk to someone. In that case, you

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might try to spend as much time with the person as possible, even if it is somewhat exhausting for both of you.

The easiest way to conclude an interview is when you come to the end of a tape. You might say something like, "Well, look at that! We have filled up two tapes. Perhaps this is a good time to stop." Then, if you want to continue interviewing that person, arrange for a second interview. Another natural time to conclude an interview is when you come to the end of a particular topic of discussion. You might say, "Since we have finished talking about your childhood and school years, perhaps this is a good stopping place. The next time I come, we can begin with what you did after you graduated from high school."

The most important thing to remember when concluding an interview is to let the interviewee know that the time spent with them was valuable to you. You might say, "I have really enjoyed this interview, and I think the information and stories that you have shared with me are a valuable addition to the history of (the topic). Thank you so much for taking the time and effort to help me with this project."

With experience will come the ability to find an appropriate time and way to bring an interview to a close. After turning off the tape recorder, stay a bit longer to chat. You don't want your interviewee to think that the only interest you have in them is what you get on tape. You might want to take your time in packing up your equipment because quite often a post-interview chat brings up a topic that you want to record.

As you leave the interview, be sure to let the interviewee know how to get in touch with you, what will become of the tape and an estimated time when he or she can expect to receive a copy of the tape or transcript. You may also want to put the interviewee's name on your project mailing list or make the person an honorary member of your organization for a year. Individuals who have a pleasant interview experience may prove helpful in convincing others to help with your research.

Oral History Plus Emerging Technologies
The purpose of this publication is to discuss the principles of oral history, many of which may apply to other aspects of memory recording, such as video history. New technologies, including computer imaging and digital recording, also continue to expand the possibilities. The fundamental concepts of good interviewing remain the same, however, regardless of the medium. Information contained in this document applies to a wide range of preservation projects and is designed to make recording history easier, and thus more common. Remember, the objective is to get the stories, even if your only method of recording is pen and paper.

PROCESSING THE INTERVIEWS

Once an interview is completed, the work of preservation begins. The true value of a recorded oral history is in how it is used and how it is made accessible for research. A recorded tape in an attic or a shoe box is not preserved; time and the elements take their toll, and eventually the information is lost. That's why it is best to process the interviews as quickly and as systematically as possible. Here are some suggestions:

Work from Copies, Preserve Originals
Ideally, it is best to work from a copy tape, which is stored separately from the original. In the event of an accident you want the original, or master, to be secure. Label the tapes with basic information about the interview: the name of the interviewee, the date, time, place and project name (if any). If you have room on the label, you may include the interviewer's name and a brief list of topics covered in the interview:

> **Example:**
> Jergenson, Scotty
> 5-9-98 Int.: D. Utley
> Aviation Project: air shows, home builts

You can also use the tape case liner to provide additional information about the interview.

Make Notes/Index
A simple way to process a tape is to replay it and make notes about the content. You may want to use a stopwatch or the digital counter on the recorder to produce an index. Store the notes and the index in a separate file and make them available as finding aids for the project collection.

Create Selective Transcripts
As you listen to the tape and make notes, you may

want to produce *selective transcripts*. That is, transcribe verbatim only those select portions of the tape that provide the most dramatic, important, or relevant quotes. Make abbreviated notes about the rest of the interview portions.

Example:
Eddie Wegner on bathing in a washtub:
"The way we learned to take a bath in a number 3, you sit frog style, you know. You crossed your legs, the lower part of your legs, and sat down in the tub and then bathed from the top on down. And then the last end, your feet and legs, you washed them while standing in the tub. Then you walked out on the towel and dried off."
Baths usually once a week on Saturdays; family shared the bath water.

Prepare Full Transcripts
Full transcripts involve the verbatim transcription — both questions and answers — of the entire interview. This process is more time consuming and therefore potentially more expensive, but it provides a convenient way to use the information on the tape, and it may even extend the life of the interview, since the life span of magnetized tapes is limited. Plan for an average of five to eight hours of transcribing for every hour of tape. If you have several tapes to process, you may want to invest in a transcribing machine with a foot pedal and back-up capabilities to help speed up the process.

Store Carefully
Store the tapes in a safe place, preferably with someone who understands their value. You may want to enlist the assistance of a local library, museum, college, archives or historical society. If possible, store the tapes on wooden shelves or in a wooden file cabinet. Because the tapes are magnetized, long-term damage can result if they are stored against metal. Light can also be detrimental to tapes over long periods of time, so a dark storage space is best. Try not to work with original tapes, except for making additional copies as needed. Researchers should use only the copy tapes, or better, the transcripts.

Remember, the true value of an oral history interview is that it preserves a part of the past. It is, in itself, a piece of history. Take the time and the necessary precautions to ensure the information will be available for future research. If it is valuable enough to collect, it is valuable enough to preserve. ■

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All photography provided courtesy of TxDOT and Texas Highways Magazine

UNDERSTANDING ETHICAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

In 1968, the Oral History Association established a code of ethics for oral historians called *Goals and Guidelines.* The guidelines remind the interviewer that the interviewee deserves the utmost respect. Interviewees are doing the interviewer a favor — they are giving their personal memoirs to the public. They deserve confidentiality and respect.

If you plan to make anything on the tape available to the public, there are several things you need to know. First, you need to have the person you interview sign a release form. Each person owns their own words and retains ownership of those words unless they provide you with a deed of gift (a contract in writing) which gives you permission to use their words. For public use, both the interviewee *and* the interviewer must give written permission. Samples of release forms follow.

SAMPLE: INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION – THE ORAL TAPE "LABEL"

This is ________________________________. Today is ____________________________. I'm interviewing for the ___________ time (Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms., Dr., Rev., etc.) ____. The interview is taking place in (the) (home, office, backyard, other described place) of ____________________ ______________________ at (address)______________________________. This interview is being conducted by (specific group) ____ and is part of the _____________________________ project.

Sample Introductions:

This is Charles Blanks, a member of the Lipscomb County (Texas) Historical Commission. Today is March 2, 1999. I'm interviewing for the first time Mr. Scotty Jergenson, a longtime resident of the Glenn Springs community in Lipscomb County. This interview is taking place at Mr. Jergenson's office in the Williams Building, 3010 Martindale Drive, in Borger, Texas. This interview is being conducted by the Lipscomb County Historical Commission and is part of the Communities of Lipscomb County Oral History Project.

This is Mildred Pierce, a volunteer curator with the Republic of the Rio Grande Museum in Laredo, Texas. Today is November 9, 1999. I'm interviewing for the seventh time Mrs. Yolanda Rodriguez of San Ygnacio. This interview is taking place in the home of Mrs. Rodriguez at 710 Burleson Street in San Ygnacio, Zapata County, Texas. The interview is being conducted by the Republic of the Rio Grande Museum and is part of the Arts and Crafts Oral History Project. Our general topic today will be quilt-making.

SAMPLE: WRITTEN UNRESTRICTED AGREEMENT

Hays County Historical Commission
Life in San Marcos Oral History Project

INTERVIEW AGREEMENT

The purpose of the Life in San Marcos Oral History Project is to gather and preserve historical evidence about lifeways, events, politics, neighborhoods, and historic preservation in the county seat of Hays County by means of the tape-recorded interview. Tape recordings and transcripts resulting from such interviews become part of the archives of the Hays County Historical Commission, San Marcos, Texas. This material will be made available for historical and other academic research and publication by interested parties, including members of the interviewee's family.

We, the undersigned, have read the above and voluntarily offer the Hays County Historical Commission full use of the information contained on tape recordings and in transcripts of these oral history interviews. In view of the historical value of this research material, we hereby assign rights, title and interest pertaining to it to the Hays County Historical Commission.

____________________________ ____________________________
Interviewee (signature) Interviewer (signature)

____________________________ ____________________________
Name of interviewee (print) Name of interviewer (print)

____________________________ ____________________________
Date Date

____
Address of interviewee

____
City State Zip

____
Telephone number of interviewee

SAMPLE: INTERVIEW AGREEMENTS WITH RESTRICTIONS

In those instances where an interviewee has reservations about the content of the tape recordings, the transcripts, or their public use, an agreement similar to the one on the previous page could be drawn up with the restrictions duly noted.

Example:
I (the interviewee) have read the above and I voluntarily offer the information contained on the tape recordings and in the transcripts of these oral history interviews. In view of the historical value of this research material, I hereby permit the Hays County Historical Commission to retain it, with the restrictions noted below placed on its use.

Nature of restrictions on use of tape recordings/transcripts:

____

____

____

____

____

____
Interviewee (signature)

____
Name of interviewee (print)

____
Date

Such restrictions might include:

- A time limit (Be specific in number of years; avoid “until after I’m dead,” because it may prove difficult to maintain that information. Be sure your organization can keep the material secure as requested.)
- Deletion of material from the transcript (Note in the transcript that material has been removed at the request of the interviewee.)
- The interviewee’s right to edit the transcript (Note in the transcript that it was edited by the interviewee; provide the date of the changes.)

Generally, you don’t need a restriction form for the interviewee to add additional information to the transcript. Include such information in brackets or as an addendum.

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Ives, Edward D. *The Tape Recorded Interview: A Manual for Fieldworkers in Folklore and Oral History,* second edition. University of Tennessee Press, 1995.

Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History.* New York: Twayne Publishers, 1994.

Schorzman, Terri A., editor. *A Practical Introduction to Videohistory: The Smithsonian Institution and Alfred P. Sloan Foundation Experiment.* Krieger Publishing Company, 1993.

Yow, Valerie Raleigh. *Recording Oral History: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists.* Sage Publications, 1994.

The following associations publish outstanding technical leaflets on specific topics in oral history, which can be ordered directly from them:

American Association for State and Local History
1717 Church Street
Nashville, TN 37203
Phone: 615/320-3203
Web site: www.aaslh.org

Bogart, Barbara Allen. *Using Oral History in Museums.*

Shopes, Linda. *Using Oral History for a Family History Project.*

Tyrrell, William G. *Tape Recording Local History.*

Oral History Association
Dickinson College
P.O. Box 1773
Carlisle, PA 17013
Phone: 717/245-1036
Web site: omega.dickenson.edu/organizations/oha/

Lanman, Barry A. and George L. Mehaffy. *Oral History in the Secondary School Classroom,* 1988.

Mercier, Laurie and Madeline Buckendorf. *Using Oral History in Community History Projects,* 1992.

Neuenschwander, John A. *Oral History and the Law,* 1993.

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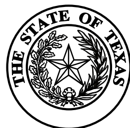

TEXAS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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