



Archives: Oral History for Archivists

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Oral history research as conducted by archivists

What is oral history research?

- Oral history has emerged as a historical approach that is being considered by archivists involved with the collection and accessibility of archival collections for researchers and interested members of the public (Schellnack-Kelly, 2022).
- There is no simple road map on how to do oral history. Rather, training in oral history interviewing is a *learning process* of how to develop the confidence to make research *decisions* appropriate to specific people, situations, and social/cultural/gendered circumstances (Field 2012).

Oral history collections

What are Oral Histories:

- In oral history, the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events are collected, preserved, and interpreted. The oral history is the oldest type of historical inquiry, predating written narratives, as well as one of the most modern, developed using tape recorders in the 1940s and using 21st-century digital technologies today (retrieved from <https://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/>, 06/06/2022).
- An oral history interview captures memories and personal remarks associated with historical significance. Interviews generally consist of an interviewer asking well-prepared questions to an interviewee and recording the exchange in audio or video format.



What are oral traditions?

- A community's cultural and historical traditions passed down by word of mouth or example from one generation to another without written instruction.



Why are life stories so significant?

- Life stories can be used to fill gaps evident in written archives
- Interviews may involve emotional content. The archivist must allow for this when conducting oral history interviews

Why is oral history fundamentally a process of “dialogues about memory”?

- A background study of the phenomenon and the written recorded archives can be supplemented by including oral history to record voices that have been sidelined.

What are the central skills of the oral history interviewer?

- Archivists must develop empathy when interviewing
- The interviewer must be able to be objective when conducting the interview
- Ethics towards the interviewee must be considered – include informed consent and permission to share the information.

Video clips relating to oral history and storytelling

- How to conduct an oral history interview:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mVv_QAFhm1A
- Practical advise when conducting oral history interview:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nKr69sOW_dU
- The power of sharing history through storytelling:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YfNAXpn-czw>