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Manuscripts should be sent to the editor, Ray Tevis, INDIANA LIBRARIES, Department of Library Science/NQ322, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306.

Content: INDIANA LIBRARIES publishes original articles written with the Indiana library community in mind. Many issues are theme oriented. The Publications Board welcomes all timely contributions.

Beginning with Vol. 5, 1985, INDIANA LIBRARIES will be published as warranted by the number of articles submitted.

Preparation: All manuscripts must be double-spaced throughout with good margins. Writers are encouraged to use the format described in Kate L. Turabian's *A Manual for Writers of Term Papers, Theses and Dissertations*, 4th ed., with footnotes at the end of the manuscript. They may, however, use another style manual with which they are familiar. Writers should be identified by a cover sheet with author's name, position and address. Identifying information should not appear on the manuscript.

Photographs or graphics are welcome and should accompany manuscript if applicable. Contributions of major importance should be 10-15 pages double spaced. Rebuttals, whimsical pieces, and short essays should be 2-7 pages double spaced.

Processing: Manuscripts will be acknowledged upon receipt, and a decision concerning use will be made twenty days after the issue manuscript deadline. The editor reserves the right to revise all accepted manuscripts for clarity and style. Upon publication, the author will receive two complimentary copies.

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Oral History Projects

Oral history collections are recent developments in many libraries. The pursuit and advocacy of oral history began primarily after World War II, and the importance of oral history has been acknowledged by both large and small communities. Institutions and individuals cannot ignore the valuable insights about community developments and events that can be retrieved only by the implementation of oral history programs. The rich, varied experiences of every individual in the community bring a new, different interpretation to the community's development. A complete picture of a community's history is impossible, but with oral history projects, a more accurate picture may be ascertained by historians in their pursuit for truth.

The four articles in this issue present many viewpoints on oral history. In "Oral History and Libraries," David C. Tambo, Head of Special Collections at Ball State University, gives an introduction to and an overview of oral history. Tambo's informative article provides librarians with a starting point, a first place to examine for definitions, interpretations, assets and liabilities of oral history. For readers desiring further information, he has provided a bibliography; entries are in major categories and annotated when warranted.

The next two articles illustrate the oral history programs underway at two Indiana public libraries. Barbara Elliott, Assistant Director, Bluffton-Wells County Public Library, describes "The Oral History Collection at Bluffton-Wells County Public Library," and Linda L. Robertson, Director, Wabash Carnegie Public Library, discusses that library's program in "Oral History—Alive and Doing Well in Wabash." Both libraries made a commitment to establish and maintain oral history programs and have endeavored to strengthen

local collections with these supplements. The Honeywell project at Wabash, Robertson states, "was accepted at Columbia University for its collection of business history oral histories." Local projects, as on this occasion, may relate to the national scene.

J. Paul Mitchell, Professor at Ball State University, presents an oral history practitioner's point of view. He discusses frankly his involvement in oral history projects, including his frustrations, insights, elations, and techniques. Mitchell also notes "the difference between a project that is intended to create transcripts for a collection and one that is intended to produce a written history or study based on oral history." This is a "difference" that librarians should recognize and of which they should be cognizant.

After reading this issue and before beginning an oral history program, librarians will want to examine the state-wide endeavors of F. Gerald Handfield, Jr., and the publications of Indiana University and Indiana Historical Bureau. These will provide the foundation for those seriously considering oral history.

Indiana Libraries will begin volume 5 as an occasional publication. The first theme issue will be "Online Searching." The Special Guest Editor for this issue will be Eileen McGrath of Wabash College.

—RT

Oral History
and
Libraries

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In 1948 Allan Nevins established the Oral History Research Center at Columbia University. Since that time, several hundred additional programs have sprung up, each devoted to the collection, preservation and dissemination of oral history data. Today, major programs exist in every section of the United States and most other countries.[1]

Oral history programs frequently are attached to university libraries or archives, but a number also are found in public libraries. It would be misleading, however, to imply that a majority of libraries in Indiana, or the rest of the country, engage in oral history in some fashion or other. In many localities there may be an interest in oral history but lack of an institutional focus for that interest. In such instances, what should be the role of the library? In what ways can the library participate in oral history? What are the advantages and disadvantages? What costs and responsibilities are likely to be incurred? In the following discussion, these and other issues are raised in the hope that a critical, more informed appraisal of the current situation will emerge.

ORAL HISTORY
What is Oral History?

Oral history commonly is viewed both as a method and a body of material. As a method, it is only one of several tools in the historian's kit. It is like other historical research in that data collected must be checked for accuracy, whenever possible, with other independently derived sources. For example, if a person describes an event that he or she participated in, it may be possible to confirm certain basic facts about the event from written sources such as newspaper accounts. On the other hand, if no written documentation exists, it may be necessary to compile similar data from other oral sources.[2]

Oral history as a method taps the memory of a person or group, and may include discussion of a wide range of topics concerning individuals, events or activities. It is based upon observation, association or participation, and not upon hearsay. It requires careful selection of persons to be interviewed and topics to be covered, and is not merely a series of rambling, disconnected reminiscences. Generally it involves face-to-face contact, utilizing a question and answer format. Usually, though not always, the resultant information is recorded on oral tape or videotape.[3]

Some historiographers have argued that oral history is unique in its use of a question and answer format; in effect creating, rather than just collecting, data.[4] This argument, however, ignores certain basic similarities between oral history and other historical inquiry. Historians working with written sources, for example, extract data relevant to their questions from a finite body of preserved material. Sometimes the data which would answer their questions simply have not been preserved. Practitioners of oral history likewise employ interview techniques to retrieve pertinent information from a finite store of material retained by the human memory. Historians using oral sources do not always get answers to their questions either. Memory is selective and may not have retained the data sought. And, as we all know, many people who are founts of information die before being interviewed.

Oral history is different than other historical inquiry, but for reasons dealing more with the nature of the data. Written data, in effect, is frozen in time. The words on a piece of paper remain the same, year after year. The same is not true of human memory. A person's perception of events changes over time. Interviewing a person immediately after an event, for example, may yield a wealth of detail but the significance of the event, measured against other forthcoming events, may not be known. Conversely, an interview conducted years later may explore the interconnections of events, but much of the individual perception of details surrounding the

events may have been lost.[5] What makes oral history as a method different, then, is that it is dealing with a fluid, rather than fixed, set of data. Ironically, the recording of oral information on tape fixes it in time as well. Thus, future historians using collections of interviews will employ much the same critical analysis for oral history (as a body of material) as for other written sources.

Oral History: Possibilities and Limitations

Most oral projects, except for some better funded operations, tend to focus on topics that are local in nature. One reason is that interest in local history has experienced a significant upswing over the past few years, both in academic circles and with the public. Another more pragmatic reason is that potential interviewees are close at hand.

Local history projects tend to encompass a wide range of subject matter, as a recent survey of the Muncie, Indiana, area has revealed.[6] The purpose of our survey was relatively straightforward: to identify and locate past and ongoing local oral history projects, conducted by individuals, groups or other institutions. Our long range goals were to act as a repository for local collections and to develop a program which initially would identify topics still in need of research, and later, either to conduct interviews in those areas or encourage others to do so.

We began the survey with an examination of our current holdings, which included collections of local business histories, labor history, black history, life histories of a number of individuals, Muncie response to the Vietnam War era, and reminiscences of local World War I veterans. Other collections, still in private hands, included material on Muncie Jewish history, a history of Ball Memorial Hospital, additional life histories, and a history of the Burris laboratory school at Ball State. More recently, additional projects have emerged. We, for example, are planning a series of interviews with Ball State faculty and administrators to supplement the holdings of the University Archives. Another project (conducted by a faculty member) will examine Muncie aviation history.

The range of topics covered is by no means comprehensive. Future projects are likely to include histories of religious institutions, professions, and organizations; women's history; neighborhood histories; historic preservation oriented histories of individual buildings and their occupants; and more general examination of various periods in Muncie's past. As Muncie has come to be known as Middletown, another area of inquiry might be the Middletown studies themselves—an historiographical investigation of the researchers and their

methodology, reaction of participants, and an assessment of the impact on Muncie of being in the public eye for more than half a century.

What all of these oral history projects have in common is that they supplement the existing published and archival material. Newspapers, city directories, county histories, photographs, diaries, correspondence and the like are valuable local history resources. Frequently, however, they provide only sketchy information about an individual's life, the development of a business, or the impact of a traumatic event upon the local populace. Some groups, such as minorities and women, are unevenly represented in the written documentation. Also alarming, from an historical perspective, is the fact that much information presently is not conveyed by writing and is not retained in any permanent form.

Oral history can address some of these shortcomings. The range of subject matter is limited only by the existence of knowledgeable interviewees. Through oral history, individual perceptions, motivation and decision making processes may be explored. Large-scale events may be reduced to human terms. And perhaps most importantly, a wealth of detailed information may be preserved, that otherwise would be unavailable to future generations.[7]

Oral history, however, is not without its shortcomings. Oftentimes there is a tendency to trivialize or engage in nostalgia; to uncritically assemble a vast array of largely insignificant data. As with other areas of historical inquiry, oral history must be selective. Not everything is worth preserving.

A different sort of shortcoming derives from the constraints of the human life span. Most individuals remember very little before their later childhood. This means that a person 100 years old will be knowledgeable about the experiences of perhaps the last 90 years. As a result, oral history today is confined primarily to developments of the twentieth century.

Oral history also is weak in regard to quantifiable data. Very few business-related oral histories, for example, will contain detailed figures on production, sales, cost or profit. When individuals do remember figures, they often are not time specific. How many of us have heard comments like "I remember when chocolate bars were only $.05"? But when exactly was that?

Finally, there is the issue of candor, although this obviously is not a problem limited solely to oral history. Interviewees, often for reasons best known to themselves, may distort, misrepresent, mislead or deny all knowledge of a given subject. The conscious act of assembling an historic record, in itself, may lead some interviewees to self-censor certain comments or, conversely, to inflate their role in an event. While perhaps not a common occurrence, oral history

practitioners realize that this is yet one more area in which they must critically evaluate the accuracy of their data.[8]

The Role of Oral History in the Library

Mary Jo Pugh, in an extremely cogent article, has argued that libraries may get involved in oral history at one or more levels of commitment.[9] Revising Pugh's analytical structure slightly, one might view these levels as:

1) developing collections of published materials
2) acting as a repository for primary resource materials
3) maintaining a program which records oral history

Acquisition of published materials tends to fall within commonly accepted library practice and procedures but, as Pugh rightly points out, involvement at the repository or program level may lead libraries into new areas requiring unfamiliar methods of technical processing, storage, and information retrieval.[10] Recording and maintaining oral history collections, in short, is an expensive, labor intensive process which should be undertaken only after a careful assessment of their worth in relation to the overall library program.

1) Developing Collections of Published Materials

The bibliography at the end of this article contains a selection of largely annotated entries which may prove helpful in building a body of published literature concerning oral history. The first section lists several of the more important recent oral history bibliographies. Of particular note is John J. Fox's "Recent Works of Note," a regular feature in the *International Journal of Oral History*, which is the best single current awareness tool.

In the past few years, a bewildering number of how-to-to-it manuals and handbooks also have appeared. Some, such as Willa K. Baum's *Oral History for the Local Historical Society*, lead the reader through a range of issues, from pre-interview research to equipment selection. Others focus on more specific topics such as transcription and indexing procedures, or methodological considerations. A few titles in this section have been included primarily for their appendices, which contain sample forms and questionnaires. A particularly good value (single copies free) and very readable introduction to the field is F. Gerald Handfield's *History on Tape: A Guide for Oral History in Indiana*.

Guides and directories likewise have been appearing in profusion. At one end of the spectrum, in terms of geographic scope, are works such as the Microfilming Corporation of America's *Directory of Oral History Programs in the United States*, which attempt to pro-

vide a comprehensive list of programs at a national or even international level. Others, such as Kathryn Wrigley's *Directory of Illinois Oral History Resources*, have adopted a statewide focus. A number of guides to the collections of individual programs also exist. The most ambitious undertaking of this sort is the Columbia University Oral History Research Office's *The Oral Collection of Columbia University*.

Journals and newsletters in the field of oral history tend to be published by the various professional organizations. In Indiana the Oral History Roundtable puts out *The Recorder*, which is an essential source of information for oral history developments in the state. A more recent publication of statewide interest is *The Oral History Research Center Newsletter*, from Indiana University. At a national level, for the United States, the Oral History Association issues a *Newsletter* and the *Oral History Review*. Somewhat less accessible are similar publications for other nations, such as the *Journal of the Canadian Oral History Association* and *Oral History* (published by the Oral History Association in Great Britain).

A number of monographs contain useful information on oral history, although not devoted solely to the topic. Thomas E. Felt's *Researching, Writing and Publishing Local History*, for example, contains a very pertinent section on the value of oral history in documenting local history issues. Over the years, a number of library journals have published articles and, in some cases, devoted entire issues to oral history. One seminal article (not in a library journal) is the Oral History Association's "Oral History Evaluation Guidelines," which should be required reading for anyone considering a larger commitment to oral history.

Not included in the bibliography for sake of brevity, but nonetheless an important category in terms of collection development, are those histories, biographies and other works which have relied heavily upon oral history material as a source of documentation. Some of the more notable titles are James MacGregor Burns, *Roosevelt: Soldier of Freedom 1940-1945* (New York: Harcourt, 1970); Felix Frankfurter, *Frankfurter Reminisces* (New York: Reynal, 1960); Merle Miller, *Plain Speaking: An Oral Biography of Harry S. Truman* (New York: Berkeley/Putnam, 1974); William Lynwood Montell, *The Saga of Coe Ridge: A Study in Oral History* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1970); Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon, 1970); and T. Harry Williams, *Huey Long* (New York: Knopf, 1969).

Perhaps the single most important development in the field of oral history publishing has been *The New York Times Oral History Program*, a micropublishing endeavor from the Microfilming Corpo-

ration of America. As a result of the program, libraries now may purchase significant portions of collections from some of the most notable oral history programs in the country, including the Columbia Oral History Research Office, the Appalachian Oral History Project, the New Orleans Jazz Oral History Collection of Tulane University, the Twentieth Century Trade Union Woman: Vehicle for Social Change Oral History Collection, and the United States Senate Historical Office Oral History Collection. Such a service, however, is not inexpensive. The cost, for example, of the Eisenhower Administration Project (197 microfiche), from the Columbia Oral History Research Office, is $880". 11

2) Repository Status

Libraries frequently are approached by local historians, school groups, genealogists, historical societies, and others who offer their personal oral history collections, realizing that they cannot preserve the materials indefinitely nor make them accessible on a regular basis to the public. If the library accepts such donations, it is moving into the realm of primary resource materials and is, in effect, taking on archival functions, e.g. acquisition, arrangement and description, maintenance, and dissemination of information about holdings. Prior to taking such a step, however, several factors should be considered.

One of the most immediate issues is that of a collection development policy in regard to oral history materials. Will the library take everything offered? Will it adopt an active stance, soliciting further materials? Clearly some selection standards are necessary, but what criteria are relevant?

To an extent, selection criteria employed for published works also apply to primary resource materials. Oral history collections should complement other materials of a similar subject focus which the library is collecting, and should serve the perceived needs of some segment of the library's clientele. Other selection criteria, however, may be less clear. Many collections, for example, tend to be repetitive in nature. Tape after tape may be devoted to a single topic, with similar responses gathered from a number of interviewees. To what extent are the interviewees providing supporting, corroborating evidence? To what extent are they merely going over the same ground, ad nauseum? Is it really necessary to preserve all of these interviews? In many cases the answer is no. But, in such instances, which interviews should be saved? Often, the only solution is to evaluate the quality of each interview and to preserve the best. With extremely large collections, some kind of sampling technique may be more appropriate. Both approaches, however, assume sub-

stantial subject and methodological expertise on the part of the person doing the selection.

Another issue relates to the format of the oral history data. Typically, an oral history collection consists of a series of tapes and some sort of description ranging from brief, handwritten notes about the contents of the tapes, to fully edited, typed transcripts. Some collections contain tapes alone. Established oral history programs, however, have found that in cases where both tapes and transcripts are available, almost invariably transcripts are preferred. It is much easier to page through a transcript than to jump from one part of a tape to another. What, then, should the library do about those collections consisting solely of tapes, or tapes with inadequate documentation? Does it have the resources to do transcription or a more abbreviated form of description? A ten-hour collection may sound manageable, but this probably will translate into 300 hours or so of processing time (to type a verbatim transcript, audit and edit the transcript, retype, proofread, and type the final copy).[12]

The expenditure of time for transcription is significant, yet it is only one of several cost factors that oral history repositories face. Other labor costs include cataloging (and all oral history collections, as unique materials, require original cataloging); preparation of guides or inventories to collections; duplication of tapes and transcripts to provide user copies (originals should be retained as archival masters and not be used by the public as they cannot be replaced); costs associated with making the collections accessible (reference service and retrieval of materials, since they normally are not placed alongside other published materials in the open stacks); and general administration of the program. Further resource needs include space (for processing and listening), equipment (tape recorders, transcribers, typewriters) and supplies (audiotape and other general office supplies). In short, maintaining an oral history repository is an expensive proposition, which probably will require an annual commitment of several thousand dollars in staff time alone.[13]

3) Establishing an Oral History Program

Oral history programs usually record, as well as store, oral history data. An obvious advantage for the oral history program is that it has a measure of control over the nature and quality of material collected, since it is involved in the interviewing process, whereas the institution that serves solely as a repository is largely dependent upon the interests and often widely varying levels of expertise of its donors.

Many programs rely heavily upon their own staff to do interviewing, but some advocates of library participation in oral history

programs argue that it is possible, even preferable, for library personnel to administer the program, leaving the actual interviewing to a body of interested volunteers.[14] Such an approach is less expensive and encourages greater community involvement. Its success, however, hinges upon the capabilities of the volunteers and the degree of supervision that the library is able to provide.

The interview process itself takes up a relatively small proportion of the time needed to maintain an oral history program. Prior planning and preparation are extensive. Topic areas must be defined, background research conducted, interview outlines prepared, interviewees contacted and equipment checked. Interviewing, too, is much more complex than simply turning on a tape recorder. Questions must be carefully phrased, equipment monitored, and legal release agreements secured to permit use and dissemination of the data. After the interview, the interviewee must be thanked, the data processed (transcribing, editing, etc.), and the information evaluated to determine if another follow-up interview is needed.[15]

The costs of maintaining an oral history program are even higher than those for repositories, which is not surprising given the additional functions. Again, much of the expense lies in the area of staff time, and this no doubt is why volunteer assistance often looks so attractive. Estimates vary widely, but libraries planning to use their own staff for most program responsibilities, probably should expect costs somewhere in the range of $400 per hour of interview (from preparatory stages to final processing of data).[16]

Oral History for Your Library?

From the foregoing discussion, it seems that an unqualified positive response is not likely to echo from all quarters, nor should it. Oral history, particularly at the repository and program levels, is not for everyone. Whether or not it is something your library should engage in, probably depends upon your response to questions such as these:

1) Clientele - What are the perceived needs of your patrons? Are these best served by available published oral history literature? Is there sufficient local history interest to justify collection of original materials in that area? Is there interest in special topics which can be met only by recording additional oral history data?

2) Library Holdings - How will oral history materials fit into the overall collection development policy of the library? Will they complement existing holdings? Will they fill in significant gaps?

3) Other Institutions - Who else in the area is doing oral history? What are their levels of commitment? Are they willing and capable of sustaining such commitment? If you decide to engage in oral history,

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will you be duplicating effort?

4) Resources - Do you have the resources (manpower, space, equipment and supplies), both in the short and long run, to develop and maintain a printed collection, repository, or oral history program? If resources are available, are they best spent in this area, or are there more pressing needs?

5) Preservation of Historical Data - What is the likely effect if you decide to engage in oral history? What if you don't?

Further Assistance

A number of active oral history programs currently exist in Indiana. Some of these are described elsewhere in this issue. For those interested in oral history but unsure what direction to take, it may prove helpful to contact representatives of these programs and ask what their experience has been. The following bibliography also should provide some guidance. One entry, the Indiana Communities Project's *Sharing Our Lives*, contains a section on "Funding and Technical Assistance," listing a variety of services of particular interest to Indiana residents.

NOTES

[1] F. Gerald Handfield, Jr., *History on Tape: A Guide for Oral History in Indiana* (Indianapolis: Indiana State Library, 1981), pp. 6-7; John J. Fox, "Window on the Past: A Guide to Oral History," *Choice* 17 (June 1980): 495. Handfield noted the existence of about 100 oral history projects in Indiana as of 1981.

[2] A more detailed discussion of these and related issues may be found in Barbara Allen and William Lynwood Montell, *From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1981) and David Henige, *Oral Historiography* New York: Longman, 1982).

[3] Willa K. Baum, "Building Community Identity Through Oral History - A New Role for the Local Library," *California Librarian* 31 (October 1970): 272.

[4] See, for example, E.D. Pfaff, "Oral History: A New Challenge for Public Libraries," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 54 (May 1980):568.

[5] Anne R. Kenney, "Retrospective and Current Oral History Projects: A Comparison," *The Midwestern Archivist* 6, 1 (1981) :47-57.

[6] This survey was conducted primarily in the spring of 1982, with the assistance of an undergraduate fellowship, provided by the Honors College, Ball State University. Holdings of tapes and related documentation are in Special Collections, Bracken Library.

[7] James E. Fogerty, "Filling the Gap: Oral History in the Archives," *American Archivist* 46 (Spring 1983) :148-57.

[8] An older but still valuable assessment of the value of oral history, offered by one its foremost practitioners, is Louis M. Starr, "Oral History: Problems and Prospects," in *Advances in Librarianship*, Vol. 2, ed. Melvin J. Voigt (New York: Seminar Press, 1971), pp. 275-304.

[9] Mary Jo Pugh, "Oral History in the Library: Levels of Commitment," *Drexel Library Quarterly* 15 (October 1979) :13. Betty McKeever Key, "Oral History in the Library," *Catholic Library World* 49 (April 1978): 380-81, offers a similar analytical model.

[10] Pugh, pp. 16-17, 22.

[11] Unfortunately, Microfilming Corporation of America recently decided to cease its micropublishing program. For details, see Cullom Davis, "From the President," *Oral History Association Newsletter* 18, 1 (Winter 1984) :4.

[12] Sangamon State University, Oral History Office, *History With a Tape Recorder: An Oral History Handbook* (Springfield, Illinois: Sangamon State University, Oral History Office, n.d.), p. 5.

[13] This section barely scratches the surface in regard to policies and procedures. More specialized information may be found in the entries in the manuals and handbooks segment of the bibliography.

[14] One of the most forceful arguments for volunteer participation is offered by Willa K. Baum, "Building Community Identity," p. 271.

[15] Indiana University, Indiana Communities Project, *Sharing Our Lives: A Handbook for Community Oral History and Folklore Research Projects* (Bloomington: Indiana University, Indiana Communities Project, 1983), pp. 7-19 and Handfield, *History on Tape*, pp. 7-14, offer extensive guidelines for establishing an oral history program.

[16] Pugh, p. 24.

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_____. "Recent Works of Note." *International Journal of Oral History* (each issue). A regular section of *IJOH*, offering the most comprehensive current awareness source for oral history materials. Sections on articles, books, catalogues/directories/guides, and dissertations.

Kusnerz, Peggy Ann. "Oral History: A Selective Bibliogrpahy." *Drexel Library Quarterly* 15, 4(1979):50-75. Nearly 200 entries, many annotated. Sections on manuals and handbooks, collection guides and directories, method, interviewing technique, theory, [oral history] as a teaching device, in libraries and archives, international perspectives, research, the profession, and periodicals.

Morrissey, Charles T. "Oral History: More Than Tapes are Spinning." *Library Journal* 105 (April 15, 1980):932-33. Includes a lengthy list of guides/catalogs to collections, with cost and addresses.

Waserman, Manfred J. *Bibliography on Oral History*. Revised ed. New York: Oral History Association, 1975. An earlier standard in the field, now largely superseded by Fox and Kusnerz.

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MANUALS AND HANDBOOKS

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Deering, Mary Jo, and Pomeroy, Barbara. *Transcribing Without Tears: A Guide to Transcribing and Editing Oral History Interviews.* Washington, D.C.: George Washington University Library, 1976.

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Henige, David. *Oral Historiography.* New York: Longman, 1982. Emphasis on research methodology.

Hoopes, James. *Oral History: An Introduction for Students.* Chapel Hill; University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

Indiana University. Indiana Communities Project. *Sharing Our Lives: A Handbook for Community Oral History and Folklore Research Projects.* Bloomington: Indiana University, Indiana Communities Project, 1983. Sections on program development, interviewing, processing collections, media presentations, funding and technical assistance (with names and addresses). Copies available for $2 from the Folklore Institute at Indiana University.

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

Langlois, W. J., ed. *A Guide to Aural History Research.* Victoria: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1976. Includes a very thorough discussion of processing, with several sample forms.

Leach, MacEdward, and Glassie, Henry. *A Guide for Collectors of Oral Traditions and Folk Cultural Material in Pennsylvania.* Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1973. Sections on suggested subject areas for collecting.

McWilliams, Jerry. *The Preservation and Restoration of Sound Recordings.* Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1980.

Moss, William W. *Oral History Program Manual.* New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974. Sections on program development, interviewing and processing, with samples of transcription and a glossary.

Oblinger, Carl. *Interviewing the People of Pennsylvania: A Conceptual Guide to Oral History.* Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission 1978. Includes instructions to interviewers and sample questionnaires.

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Public Archives Canada. Sound Archive Section, National Film Archives. *Sound Archives: Guide to Procedures*. Ottawa: Public Archives Canada, 1979. Bilingual [French/English] edition, with sections on acquisitions, accessions, description, indexing, conservation, restrictions, and reference service. Also includes sample forms and citations.

Sangamon State University. Oral History Office. *History With a Tape Recorder: An Oral History Handbook*. Springfield, Illinois: Sangamon State University, Oral History Office, n.d. Succinct sections on pre-interview planning, interview techniques, processing and equipment, from the oral history office directed by Cullom Davis. Also includes extensive bibliography of further readings.

GUIDES AND DIRECTORIES

Bullock, Constance S., comp. *The UCLA Oral History Program*. Assisted by Saundra Taylor. Los Angeles: University of California, Los Angeles, 1982. Representative of growing number of guides to individual programs.

Columbia University. Oral History Research Office. *Oral History*. Annual report, various titles, from 1949/50. Includes notes on recent acquisitions and a list of publications offered by the office.

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Meckler, Alan, and McMullin, Ruth, comps. *Oral History Collections*. New York: Bowker, 1975. Union catalog approach to oral history collections, with name and subject index, and directory of oral history centers in the U.S., Canada, Ireland, U.K., and Israel. In serious need of updating.

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The Oral History Collection at Bluffton-Wells County Public Library

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Of the myriad of tasks a professional librarian must carry out in a medium sized rural county library, that of the oral history librarian is among the most pleasurable and rewarding. What a treat it is to see "old timers" recall with a sparkle in their eye the days of their childhood and to wonder with disbelief that anyone could be interested in their memories or their place in the book of local history.

One of my first responsibilities at the Bluffton-Wells County Public Library was to develop a local history and genealogy collection. The proximity to the Allen County Public Library and a limited budget precluded the development of an extensive genealogical collection. Limited materials existed dealing with the history of Wells County. Thus, an oral history collection appeared to be an inexpensive and colorful technique to embellish the local history collection.

Dr. Jerry Handfield was most helpful in providing useful hints for the mechanics of recording and techniques of the interview. A Panasonic cassette recorder with built-in microphone and high resolution audio tapes were the equipment used. Several sources were queried to develop a pool of names of persons to be interviewed. In addition to those notable persons in the community, attempts were made to obtain interviews with the ordinary working man or housewife as well as the judge, the banker, the lawyer, and the physician. Several persons contributed names to the pool, including the county historian, library board members, members and officers of the Wells County Historical Society, and many others.

INDIANA LIBRARIES
Procedure for Interviews

After a person had been selected as a likely candidate for our oral history collection, the individual was first contacted by telephone or in person if he had no telephone, and asked if he was interested in the interview. The procedure was described briefly. The need for obtaining copyright release was explained as simply as possible. This sometimes caused concern among the elderly as they are often reluctant to sign any official looking document without advice from a family member or attorney. At this time they were urged to consult with anyone else they deemed necessary if they did not understand the need for copyright release. Our release simply states that the Bluffton-Wells County Public Library has the right to transcribe and publish the transcription after the approval of the interviewee. The release is not signed until the subject of the oral history has read the transcription.

The review procedure has often been a source of trouble. On several occasions, the individual has insisted that the transcription be changed to correct grammatical errors and slang expressions, completely destroying the flavor of the interview and much of its authenticity. The most extreme example occurred with a former local bank official, who returned with the transcript completely retyped and corrected by his secretary. The oral history at that time resembled a speech prepared for the local Chamber of Commerce. Even though the difference between an oral history and a prepared speech or publicity statement was explained in detail, he refused to sign the release for use of the original transcript. Needless to say, this oral history stands out among the rest like a "sore thumb," as a stilted, grammatically pure, insincere statement of facts in comparison to the warm, natural nature of others in the collection.

Because of the foregoing problems, great pains are now made at this initial contact to explain the nature of an oral history interview, emphasizing the importance of naturalness and authenticity. I have often taken a copy of one of the books edited by Studs Terkel, *American Dreams* and *Hard Times*, or materials from the Indiana University oral history collection to illustrate oral histories. These are excellent examples which show people speaking of things, places and events in their daily or usual expressions. Emphasis also has been placed on the fact that the library is interested in local history of Wells County and that the lives of the interviewees and those of their contemporaries are an important part of this history.

Following the initial contact, a letter which contained a list of sample questions which were to be asked at the interview was sent to the individual. The subject was asked to research dates, places, names, etc., prior to the interview. This procedure greatly reduced

interruptions during the interview to check dates, names, and places. In one or two instances, the subject invited a second person to sit in on the interview. This is not recommended since, with two persons talking, it is often difficult to have control over the interview. On the other hand, however, the presence of the second person has led to more interesting facts and often to a second interview. Rambling, a common problem with interviewing, is much more difficult to control when two subjects are discussing a topic. Arguing about dates, names and other facts has been a common occurrence when interviewing either a husband or wife with the better half kabitizing. Since subjects often find it difficult to get to the library, most of my interviews have been conducted in the home of the subject, making it difficult to graciously request privacy. After some time has elapsed to allow the verification of facts, a date is finally set for the big day— the day of the interview. It is amazing how well prepared most persons are and how interested they become in searching out events of the past. They are usually armed with old newspapers, clippings and photographs, a number of which have become part of the vertical file collection of our Indiana Room. It is important that all background noises are kept to a minimum. Pencils, paper, or even change in the pants pockets, can be most annoying when tapped, crumpled or jangled into the microphone and often mask an important statement which, unfortunately, may never be recalled exactly as it was originally stated. Since our tape recorder has a built-in microphone, it is not necessary to hold the microphone or set it in a special place. A microphone sometimes makes the subject nervous, although audio pickup is probably better. You never know what to expect in an oral history interview, however. I had a difficult time, indeed, explaining a strange noise to the typist which occurred when the family's pet cat jumped up on the table and landed smack on top of the recorder. Everyone wants to get into the act in an oral history interview!

Our greatest difficulty with the oral history collection is transcription of the audio cassette tapes. With a small typing staff there is not time for this work load, and I have resorted to searching out volunteers from the community. Most recently, the advanced typing class at the local high school has completed the rough draft typing. I hope to develop a more structured volunteer system in the near future which should alleviate this problem, since our budget does not stretch to cover such expense.

Highlights of the Collection

Bluffton, Indiana, is rich in Swiss and Germanic heritage. One of our first oral histories was with Samuel Aeschliman, lay minister

of the Apostolic Christian Church, a unique sect in America. The church was started in Switzerland by a Samuel Foelich. The first elder of this church walked 250 miles from Monroe County, Ohio, to form this church with a local membership of more than 2,000 persons. For many years, German was spoken in the church and homes of its members and special schools taught the language to the children of members. One doctrine of the church is public repentence and confession. In regular services of this church, men sit left of center aisle and the women to the right of the center aisle. Marriage is encouraged between members and converts only. The membership of this church comprises a large segment of the community of Wells County, and it has contributed rightly to the history and culture of the area. Some of these facts have been recorded in this and other oral histories.

One of the more interesting oral histories in our collection is that of a long-term legislator who was a state senator for twenty-eight years. He had an active part in many major developments in the state and describes many of these in detail including the mental health legislation in Indiana and the construction of the Carter psychiatric hospital, construction of the State Office Building and the School Reorganization Act. One of his famous quotes, "I couldn't always understand what a bill said, but I could smell what they meant," meaning he had a sense of political intuition: "You have to look and see what the law is about and why they're doing what they are doing." Two other controversial pieces of legislation discussed in this oral history which makes it most interesting involve 1) an attempt to have all public high schools and colleges teach birth control information and 2) the joint construction of the Port of Indiana by the states of Indiana and Illinois. Most interestingly, as an elected Democrat, the legislator's two favorite governors for cooperation were both Republicans.

Many comments on transportation run through the oral history collection. One interviewee recalled the celebration, as described by his father, when the first railroad reached Bluffton in 1873 in the form of the Lake Erie and Western. Many remember the first corduroy toll road between Bluffton and Fort Wayne, with a section of Bluffton still carrying the "Toll Gate" addition title. Bluffton was rich in a heritage of interurban lines. There was the line from Fort Wayne to Indianapolis which stopped in Bluffton, the line which ran from Marion to Bluffton, and the Celina, Bluffton, and Cincinnati. Every single person interviewed remembered vividly a terrible tragedy when two interurbans collided north of Bluffton at Kingsland,

Indiana. All those killed were from Bluffton and the tragedy struck almost every family in town.

Everyone seemed also to remember well his first automobile or his first opportunity to drive an automobile. Driver's licenses were not required until the 1920's and an early law required automobiles to pull over and stop while a horse and buggy passed by. One driver described his single cylinder Oldsmobile with a curved dash by saying that by going downhill with the wind at your back you could get up to 30 miles per hour if you were lucky. Backing into trees and fences and running down mail boxes and horse troughs were other common experiences for these budding drivers. One history buff described the old school hacks as being a big box pulled by two horses with a bench on either side and coal fired furnace underneath. He also described the first motor driven school bus as a 1918 G.M.C. ten and a half truck which could haul about 30 students. The entrance was at the rear with a high step. Each bus driver had a conductor whose duty it was to run ahead after the bus had stopped at the railroad crossing and to look in both directions for a train. He also had to keep order on the bus and lift the little ones on and off because the step was too high for them. For that he was paid the grand sum of $.25 per day, but that was good pay for those days.

Early Christmases in Wells County were big wonderful pine trees cut from the woods and dragged through the snow to the house where they were lit briefly with candles. A doll or a drum or a muff, or even a toy soldier, might be under or on the tree for the children. Special treats were hard candy and chocolate gum drops. The babies often received "fairy sticks," pure hard candy about the size of a lead pencil.

Disasters and tragedies are most often remembered by the individuals being interviewed. Many remembered in detail the great flood of 1913 when the Wabash River and its local tributaries were broad avenues of water where business and houses now exist. Acts of heroism abound, with people, cattle, horses, and animals all being rescued after three solid days of heavy rains. The interurban wreck, when one car was telescoped by another, touched many lives as the car was crowded with passengers from Bluffton on the way to Fort Wayne to visit the annual fair. Mrs. Marris recounted how a tornado took half her house away, but left her alive thanking God for that blessing. As if to balance the tragedy, many remembered happy times as well. The armistice after the first World War, V-Day after World War II, the centennial celebration in 1936, street fairs, weddings, etc., are some of the happier occasions described.

Oral histories are also invaluable to genealogists. Unfortunately, our oral histories have not as yet been indexed, but this is proposed

for the future. Just as the content of most oral history is not part of written history, in the same manner many names found in oral histories will be found in no other sources.

Most of the oral histories in our collection illustrate the mid-western value of hard work and perserverence leading to success in one form or another. The retired bank president told of how he started his first job working at the Boss Glove factory. He was so small that he had to stand on a wooden box to reach the thumb turner at which he worked. A prominent attorney helped support his family and pay for his education by raising and selling rabbits and chickens door-to-door. Others speak of eating moldy bread, which was distributed for free, and enjoying it. A ninety-six year old widow spoke of traveling in her horse and buggy through good weather and bad, snow and cold, to give music lessons to support her family after her husband was killed in an accident.

The same prim lady provided a clue to the cause of an accident of long standing notoriety in the county. It seems a wagon full of nitroglycerine exploded when the driver missed the ford in the Wabash River, demolising everything in sight. That same day the lady music teacher drove her horse, Belle, and buggy to instruct one of her students, Velma Klopfenstine. Velma's father owned the distillery on the other side of the river. She remembers that one of the many customers that day was the teamster with the wagon of nitro-glycerine, as he was not a welcome visitor anywhere. Thus, the first case of drunken driving evidently occurred with serious consequences in Wells County.

Oral histories offer vivid descriptions of flourishing towns that now appear as "ghost towns." Vera Cruz, formerly called Newville, population now about 75 persons, once boasted a grist mill, a hotel, four saloons, a harness shop, two groceries, a milk condensary, and furniture company. Bluffton, at one time, was the home of a tile mill, several foundries, the Farnsworth Corporation, a glove manu-facturing company, Estey Piano Company, and numerous other in-dustries. Poultry farms were big business, even in the 1880's. One resident recalls how his uncle who was in the poultry business raising ducks and chickens would accompany one, two, or three cars of poultry to New York by train. His pay for keeping the poultry watered and fed was the eggs which he gathered enroute and sold door-to-door in New York after he arrived.

Little is written in Wells County histories of the small Jewish population in Wells County. Oral history has filled that gap, with one local physician recounting how his father came to Bluffton as an itinerant peddlar, and established a flourishing business. He also remembers other Jewish families in early Wells County history.

In one of the more notable oral histories in our collection, Dr. Harold Caylor recounts how his father, a Dunkard minister, came to form the Caylor-Nickel Medical Clinic in Bluffton. Caylor began his medical practice at the time of the oil boom in Indiana, the 1890's, and came upon the idea of group practice after studying with Drs. Mayo, Graham, and Plummer in Rochester, Minnesota. Caylor recalls years in medicine from the days when his father sewed up a patient who literally carried his intestines in his hat to today's world of CAT scanners and sophisticated surgical techniques. He tells of major epidemics with typhoid fever, polio, influenza in 1918, and of the importance of drugs such as antibiotics.

Many descriptions of early rural schools are found in Wells County oral histories. Most were one or two rooms and teachers were jacks of all trades, getting to school an hour early on a cold winter's morning to fire up the pot bellied stove and staying an hour late to sweep up the floor. Drinking water was provided in a bucket with a tin cup or dipper and favored students often had the privilege of getting the water or cleaning the erasers. The high school was only available to those who could pass the entrance examination and had the means of transportation to the county seat where the high school was located. Many lived in with friends or relatives to attend high school, and many were unable to afford the time or money for this education. The Bluffton schools also established the first "year-around" educational system in the 1890's under the leadership of William Wert, as reported in the oral history of Dr. William Gitlin, physician and former local and national school board member. Gitlin has researched carefully the history of the Bluffton schools as reported in his oral history.

Likewise, the descriptions of the formation of the first church in Wells County occurs in one oral history. Six Mile Church, the oldest church in Wells County was organized by a circuit rider named Hallett Barber on September 2, 1838. A descendant of a charter member tells of sitting in the "Amen corner" and being tapped on the head with a cane when misbehaving. This congregation has built three churches. The first, a log church, was soon outgrown. The second, a white frame church, was destroyed by fire. The third, the present brick church, was built in 1915, but the congregation built a tabernacle to house the congregation during the construction of the third church.

To sum things up, oral histories are invaluable to the local history collection and genealogy. Your library is missing a great source of valuable information, as well as a sense of the culture of the community, if oral history is not a part of your library and your community.

Oral History -

Alive and Doing Well

in Wabash

Linda L. Robertson
Director
Wabash Carnegie Public Library

Back in 1970 when the staff at the Wabash Carnegie Public Library began its project, oral history was hardly more than a gleam in some state organizer's eye! In 1970 there were few guidelines, few refinements, few pamphlets or articles to read for information, and hardly any Indiana resource people to call upon for advice.

Wabash was fortunate to have in town a volunteer interviewer before it even had an oral history project. George Dingledy has done virtually all of the interviews in Wabash and has kept alive his enthusiasm for oral history for over thirteen years.

Project organization came about after the library had accumulated a number of untranscribed tapes stacked up on a shelf. Staff members looked at the growing number and thought—whoa, there! It's time to back up and start again. So, they did some of the things worth sharing now.

Wabash's is a small library project—not very grand—but it has had a lasting ability and some fairly decent quality over the years. This discussion shares some of the things about organization that they learned from the "go-out-and-do-it" school of thought.

First, if one is just beginning an oral history program, a few goals and guidelines are called for. Decide whether or not the community really needs oral history. That was answered in the affirmative in Wabash.

The last comprehensive county history had been printed in 1914 and the local historical society was made up of older people whose enthusiasm for writing and publishing had dwindled to almost nothing.

There was a need to collect memories of local people to supplement the official records and the newspaper accounts of county events. There also was some talk of putting together a Bicentennial edition of a new county history, and the interviews became valuable for that reason later on.

Decide, too, if the library (or other sponsoring agency) can afford oral history. It is not an inexpensive project—even with the aid of volunteers. In equipment and tapes Wabash has spent no more than $1500 on oral history, but in the cost of manhours spent transcribing, copying, mailing, retyping, indexing, binding, and cataloging, administrators shudder at the thought and do not keep track of cost.

Wabash simply does not compute the costs of transcription and all that goes to get a finished product. There are three library staff members who know that if there are tapes to do, they are expected to transcribe as they find time. It may not be the best method of production, but it gets the job done without waiting for a volunteer and without having to hire extra staff.

Initially, equipment purchases may be a barrier. Wabash started with a reel-to-reel recorder, moved to an inexpensive portable cassette recorder, and abandoned that for a better quality recorder, which was, by the way, the gift of a person who had been interviewed. That last recorder is the one still in use after eight years, still with little or no mechanical difficulty. The original price was about $225.

The library also purchased an IBM transcriber unit with a foot control and headset. All old typewriters have been replaced with IBM Selectrics (not just for this project, however)—a great boon to the way the clerks and typists feel about the oral history program!

Wabash library purchased fairly good 60 minute cassette tapes, about 25 at a time for a better price break, and bought cassette boxes and shelves to house the completed tapes. Tapes longer than 60 minutes are not recommended because of their facility for tangling with the container.

Plan on keeping up with what others are doing. It really is necessary for those involved in oral history to attend workshops, to belong to the Indiana Oral History Round Table, and to receive and read newsletters, books and pamphlets on the subject.

Decide who will use the oral history collection. The Wabash collection is transcribed, indexed, bound, cataloged, and housed in a relatively secure genealogy and local history areas of the library.

Tapes are kept in the director's office and they are available for listening although the library seldom receives a request for listening. The transcripts are available to historians, students, genealogists, other researchers, and, sometimes, just plain interested people.

The original copy of the interview is bound, an extra copy is kept in a file cabinet, and a copy is sent to the Indiana State Library. On occasion, someone will ask for a copy of a transcript and/or a copy of a tape (usually a family member of an interviewee) and the library complies. Tapes are duplicated at the local high school. Virtually no restrictions have been placed on the Wabash interviews by those interviewed.

If tapes are to be transcribed—and it is highly recommended—decide whether someone is going to edit the transcript and tape and if the tapes are going to be kept or erased and re-used. Wabash keeps its tapes. Some editing of the transcripts is done—mostly taking out stammering and dividing up run-on sentences and thoughts. "So-called" historical memory is not corrected even if the staff knows fairly certainly that an error has been made. Some of the interviews include considerable trivia and some wandering away from the subject. Wandering and trivia are not edited out—some day that may be just as important to historians as the hoped-for answer would be.

Not enough stress can be given to how important having the right interviewer is. Some of the qualities of the Wabash interviewer may serve as a model for others. Dingledy is a middle-aged man who once owned a downtown appliance store. He is active in the county historical society, is involved in Rotary, is a former library board member, belongs to a toastmasters' club, and has taken some continuing education classes at Ball State University. He has served the last four years as Mayor of Wabash.

Dingledy is a person who knows many people and knows human nature. He likes people, is personable, and is able to put people at ease. He is also knowledgeable, not only about local history, but about what was going on in the world at the same time that local events were occurring. He has tried to stress in each interview some questions about the Ku Klux Klan history in the area, about local history, and about the genealogy of the person being interviewed.

Subjects for interview are suggested by the library staff and board, by the interviewer, and by people in the community. An effort is made not to overly duplicate talks with people who have had like experiences.

Next, let the local media know how the project is coming along. Wabash has had some sort of news or feature coverage after nearly every interview. It not only promotes use of the completed

interview but also makes people accept doing a future interview more readily.

A warning though—once people find out what the project is, the administrator and the interviewer should be accessible for public programs in the schools, in churches, and for service clubs and should be available for being on workshop panels and for writing various newsletter and magazine articles. Promotion has played a big part in what Wabash believes is a successful oral history program. Every time there is a program, feedback comes from the audience and makes the whole process even that much more enjoyable.

Jerry Handfield of the State Historical Society can help design an appropriate release form for interviewees to sign. They will give the library and any designees the authority to use the materials in the interviews as they see fit. It will also give the interviewee the right to place restrictions on all or part of his interview.

Decide if the program is going to be built around the "shotgun" approach or the "rifle" approach. That is, will the concentration be on a wide range of experiences or on a specific event or period of history. Wabash has a bit of both. It is mostly a shotgun approach, but Wabash does have a number of interviews that concentrate on the history of the Honeywell plant that was in Wabash. The founder, Mark Honeywell, was a Wabash native, so it was a natural for the library to do part of a program built around Mark Honeywell. Besides, the secretarial pool at the company did those transcriptions and the finished Honeywell project was accepted at Columbia University for its collection of business history oral histories.

Now, if a person can think of all this in advance and get properly organized, one of these days, he, too, can have former mayors tell "their side" of the city's story and former police chiefs recount their big moments in fighting crime. He, too, can have a town drunk speak of prohibition, bootlegging, and spending time in the state prison. He can find out where the "red light" district was in town near the turn of the century. And he can talk with the town crackpot—if he can narrow it down to just one!

Oral History
on the Local Level:

Personal Reflections

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I did not enter the historical profession to become involved in oral history. Nor did I begin with an interest in local history. Indeed, local chronicles bored me and written history based on interviews and recollections seemed suspect at best. During my first ten years as a professional, I used the traditional sources—manuscript collections, public records, newspapers. My dissertation, and the research that represented its continuation, concerned municipal reform in Denver during the Progressive Era. I was careful to insist that I was writing, not local but urban, history, a perfectly respectable pursuit.

But even then I had become aware of the enormous information gaps left by reliance on traditional sources. The events and actors I studied were of local (that word would not go away), rather than national, significance. And the people involved saw each other often, or talked on the telephone; the only time letters appeared was when someone was out of town for an extended time. Moreover, local actors were not so impressed by their self-importance that they kept every scrap of writing; hence, few left manuscript collections, and those few were not always helpful. Clearly, good histories of local movements would have to get information from other sources.

REFLECTIONS

I became involved in oral history as a result of a particular project. From urban (local?) history I developed an interest and expertise in black history. Thus I was approached in 1971 to write a history of the black community of Muncie. It seemed a fascinating topic, so I agreed. I had very little idea of what would follow, or even of how I would proceed. Actually I learned about oral history the most expensive way, by experience, which means trial and error— much of both.

I had a partner who was the real spearhead of this project. Hurley Goodall was a Muncie native who had become the first black fireman (in 1957) and the first black elected to the school board (1970). He was a community leader whose activities during the turbulent 1960s had convinced him that the story of black Munsonians, hitherto unrecorded, needed to be told. Whites and blacks alike needed to realize that blacks had helped build the city, had carved out a life for themselves, had persevered in spite of the obstacles posed by prejudice and discrimination. Goodall had convinced the Muncie Human Rights Commission to support the writing of such a history. The HRC accordingly contributed start-up funds, enough to free a little of my time from teaching and to buy a tape recorder and tapes. The Ball State History Department contributed student secretarial assistance to type up the tapes. Those little financial boosts were, of course, big stimulants and got the whole project started.

Goodall and I plunged in, and in our enthusiasm we probably committed every blunder and violated every rule. One of his major concerns was that the sources of the story we wanted to tell were fast drying up; several old people who had spent their lives in Muncie had died and others were in failing health. We therefore had a sense of urgency and could not waste time learning everything. (This was a valid concern: we interviewed 36 elderly people during the next three years; five years after the project's start 25 percent of them were deceased, and two others passed away before we were able to meet with them.) I read a few articles about oral history but found them irrelevant for our project; they emphasized the careful preparation for an interview—studying the events to be covered, getting all the facts straight, carefully reviewing the interviewee's career and public statements, and the like. This would have been fine had we been preparing for talks with Lyndon Johnson or ex-Governor Roger Brannigan. But we were about to talk with plain ordinary folks. There did not seem to be any background to study.

I will mention just a few of our early mistakes, because they are avoidable and readers may learn from them. First, I chose a particular cassette tape recorder because the salesman recommended

its faithful sound reproduction and because it was on sale. Its sound was good, but it was cumbersome and complex; thus, it was obtrusive during the interview and on several early occasions I lost most of the interview because I had failed to push that last button. Moreover, it had been on sale because the line was being discontinued; when something broke later, I could not get it repaired and had to coax it along.

Goodall thought it would be great to catch a number of our senior citizens at once, so he set up a group session at a retirement home. What a disaster! Confronted with a microphone and an audience, these elderly folks abandoned reticence in favor of attempts to top one another's stories. They all talked at once and incessantly, correcting, contradicting, and cackling. The tape was, of course, worthless, and in all the hubbub Goodall had been unable to take any coherent notes. He could not even return to interview individuals one by one because they seemed to have exhausted their words on the subjects.

We also committed our share of technical gaffes. We learned to put the recorder on a soft surface, to speak clearly ourselves, to ask our subjects to repeat words and phrases that were unclear. We learned to ask elderly ladies to turn off their day-time soap operas and not to have soothing background music playing. We learned to stop our own, and our subjects', nervous habits such as drumming fingers or clicking pens.

Finally, it took us both a long time to develop effective interviewing techniques. Goodall, who knew a lot about local events, tended to ask leading questions to which he got yes or no answers, to guide his interviewee to expected answers, or to focus on a few events he remembered at the expense of letting the interviewee select the subjects. Mitchell, who knew virtually nothing about local events, tended to run out of steam and questions once the basic biographical information was done. There are some long pauses in my early tapes. Eventually I learned to listen very carefully, and always anticipate a question flowing from what was being said. I learned to have a prior flexible list of questions which built on earlier interviews. Somewhat surprisingly, I discovered that a 1-2 hour interview was really exhausting for me, because it demanded such constant mental alertness.

But beyond our early pratfalls I think we learned some lessons which may be of value to others invovled in similar projects. Thus, I would like to share some more general observations and insights. Chiefly I will note the contrast between interviewing "significant" figures and "insignificant" figures. I will also note the difference between a project that is intended to create transcripts for a collection and one that is intended to produce a written history or study based on oral history.

REFLECTIONS

One stream of oral history deals with prominent individuals. The Columbia Oral History Collection includes former Presidents, governors, actors, authors, labor leaders, ambassadors, and the like. Even on the local level we are concerned with preserving the recollections of leading citizens: a longtime mayor, the founder of a local manufactory, a favorite school teacher, and so on. The interviewer often is looking for a particular angle on information already known and can be prepared from other sources to question and even politely persist in extracting an accurate response. Most importantly, such figures are accustomed to speaking and very likely they are even used to being interviewed. They are able to review their own records and prepare themselves for the interview. They will not be awed by a microphone, nor will reviewing a typescript, that is, reading their own words, be a novel experience for them. They might be cautious about signing a release, but this should pose no major obstacle. If there is a great deal of material to be covered it is often wise to schedule several sessions. In that way the interviewer can focus each session of a few issues or events, or on a single time period. Subsequent interviews may then build on the relationship and materials in earlier interviews, and the researcher may wish to clarify points and verify details. The transcript from such an interview or series of interviews may then stand on its own, an individual record of considerable value.

Another stream of oral history deals with individuals of no particular public prominence. The black history project, and others in which I have been involved subsequently, was definitely of this type. Much of what we might try to preserve on the local level is based on the recollections of "just plain folks." In this case, the interviewees were not merely somewhat faceless and nameless but also elderly and Negroes (as they insisted on being called). Did these qualities result in obstacles? Absolutely.

The major obstacle I encountered was suspicion. First, prospective interviewees were suspicious of me. I should point out that I am white. I am also a college professor, and at the time looked even younger than I was. Could I be trusted? And even if I meant well, wouldn't I get us all into trouble by my inexperience and ineptitude? Second, several interviewees were suspicious of the project. To be sure some elderly Negroes thought it about time their story got told. But others could not see why anyone would be interested in them—they had not done anything noteworthy except live for a long time. Who wanted to know all this? And why? Finally, many were suspicious of the physical trappings of oral history. It was bad enough that a young white professor should come to their house and talk and ask questions. But the tape recorder and note pad really put

them on guard. Several asked that I not record, so I did not. And I quickly knew that if I pulled out a release for them to sign I could kiss the interview goodbye.

Another major obstacle was more substantive. I discovered that elderly people who had lived in one place all or most of their lives often had little sense of time. Without too many major events (e.g., "That must have been in 1947 because we were living in Memphis at the time.") to serve as date pegs they might confuse 1920s, 1940s and 1960s. Refining this sense of time was difficult because I had so few external check points to introduce. Thus, an interview on Negro life in Muncie during the 1930s might turn out to be Muncie in the 1910s.

Confronted by these obstacles we had to define what our project was. Very often an oral history program is intended to produce a collection of tapes and transcripts. These transcripts themselves are the end product. But we had not set out to do that. Rather, we were attempting to reconstruct the framework of a past that had been long submerged and intended to write a collective, community history. Individual stories, while important, were subordinate to the larger tale. We needed to talk with a lot of people, and hadn't the time to cultivate one individual whose natural reticence precluded a complete, or even satisfactory, story. With that approach we made compromises. But we got our interviews and our information.

The problem of suspicion remains acute during any project that encompasses many interviews with ordinary people. In this particular project two factors helped overcome suspicion. First was the personal participation by Goodall. This was crucial, for I could not have gained entry on my own. All our interviewees knew him, either personally or by reputation, and they trusted him. Often we went together, especially for the earlier interviews. When I went alone it was after he had arranged the interview. But even he could not always allay suspicion. Goodall interviewed by himself one of the more prominent Negro citizens, potentially a rich source; this man was so cautious that even in the last weeks of his life he refused to allow a tape recorder and revealed almost nothing. A second factor was that as time passed word of our project spread. Later interviewees had heard about us and apparently what they had heard was good—we had no axe to grind, had kept information confidential, and could be trusted. As I became more comfortable and my own acquaintances widened, I obtained further leads from other blacks, not just Goodall. This broadening was crucial to this kind of study. Still, I was not approaching anyone unless I had a strong personal contact with the prospective interviewee.

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of having this

strong, credible personal contact. The researcher must know the individual or must have a good intermediary. To illustrate, in another later project I made an appointment with a blue collar worker whose salient characteristic for my purposes was that he had worked in a local wire mill for over 25 years. He was guardedly friendly when I arrived and certainly hospitable. But as I began the questions his suspicions grew. Without really answering any questions he excused himself. I could not help overhearing as he dialed his telephone and queried, "Are you sure he's all right, Bud?" Apparently Bud allayed his worst fears, because he returned and the interview that ensued was first-rate. However, I did not feel sufficiently approved to unleash the tape recorder, so I had to be content with written notes. Again, there was no transcript but my larger research project was immeasurably enriched. Had I been interested in collecting a transcript itself I might have returned, but there remains the chance that this man's suspicions, temporarily overcome during an hour of rapport, would have returned and he might even have regretted his openness with a stranger. My experience dealing with "little people" taught me to play an interview by ear and to get everything I could without pushing a reluctant subject too far.

As may already be evident, suspicions about the tape recorder persisted. There is no single best answer to the dilemma thus posed: if one insists on using a tape recorder some people will not consent to be interviewed, and even if they do they probably won't say much; but, if one does not use one loses a lot of good material. Again, if the project is to result in complete transcripts, documents for subsequent users, one reluctantly abandons the subject who objects to being recorded. But if the final product is a written history the oral historian simply becomes a researcher asking questions and trying to broaden the base of knowledge as much as possible; one stays, takes good notes, and then immediately writes up a report of the interview. "Little people" are not the only ones who shy away from having their words on tape. After all, who among us wants to see our private opinions and insights in writing, directly (and unassailably accurately) quoted? Every oral historian has had a subject say, "Turn that thing off and I'll tell you how it really happened." We turn it off and find out. Our interviewees trust us to incorporate that little unrecorded insight as "background" without directly attributing it to them. Sometimes we have to treat an entire interview that way.

One final problem we did not resolve was the release of the transcript. If the project is intended to produce a transcript or transcript collection, then obtaining a release is vital. Without permission to use the results we are left with a secret archive, unusable by later scholars. The process of carefully nurturing the subject must include

discussion about the need for a release. By the time the transcript has been prepared a signature should be forthcoming.

If the project is intended to produce a lot of information and its own written study, however, getting a signed release is of secondary importance. On occasion the oral historian dealing with "little people" knows not to mention a release—the last thing in the world to lay before a suspicious interviewee is a form requiring a signature. And, since the transcript itself is not crucial to the current project, the temptation is strong not to press the issue. This may be a mistake. Indeed, if there is one thing I could do over in this particular project it would be to obtain a release for every transcript. But this could only be obtained after the interviewer had earned the trust of the people interviewed.

Those who set out on oral history projects should be clear about what they are doing. Are they creating a transcript collection as an end in itself, or are they merely using oral history as an instrument to obtain material for a study which is the end product? They should also understand the very difficult requirements for interviewing "significant" figures and the "little people" for whom this may be a novel experience.

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