Preserving the Oral History of Modern America: A Collection Development Initiative at the University of South Florida, St. Petersburg

James Anthony Schnur

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PRESERVING THE ORAL HISTORY OF MODERN AMERICA:

A COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE AT THE

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA, ST. PETERSBURG

James A. Schnur

Collection Development
LIS 6511, Tampa Class
Dr. Vicki Gregory
Background Notes on the Discipline of Oral History
What Is Its Value and Why Should It Be Collected?

Considered an essential tool in present-day scholarship, oral history also served as one of the earliest means of preserving and transmitting cultural norms and values. A rich oral tradition has allowed countless humans to learn about and benefit from the folklore, customs, and habits of earlier generations. In preliterate societies, oral narratives provided an authoritative account that could easily change to match the ideals and prejudices of the audience and communal leaders. Over time, elders replaced portions of the story that failed to meet their contemporary needs with more suitable tales. The development of a written system of expression redefined both the role of language in the society and the means of verifying the accuracy of "evidence."¹

¹'Historiography' refers to the historical development of research and writing in the field of history. Just as many readers classify literary authors according to a particular genre, historians often find themselves pigeonholed into certain schools of thought. Within the field of oral historiography, scholars often differentiate between 'oral history' (the study of the recent past) and 'oral tradition' (universally understood and accepted accounts of past events in a particular culture). In addition to citations in ERIC and library literature indexes, a number of bibliographies provide a perspective of historiography in this field. For example, see Patricia Pate Havlice, Oral History: A Reference Guide and Annotated Bibliography (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company, 1985). Numerous professional organizations encourage oral history through practical guides (such as those published by the American Library Association; the American Association for State and Local History; and the Society of American Archivists) and research notes (the American Historical Association and the Organization of American Historians). However, the Oral History Association offers the best national scholarly forum for practitioners through its Oral History Review and membership directories. For an extensive discussion of the history
Despite its important role in other societies, the American historical profession generally ignored the importance of oral history prior to World War II. Similar to their colleagues in libraries, historians of the late nineteenth century attempted to transform and professionalize their discipline through the creation of rigorous academic standards and national organizations, as well as the reform of collegiate curricula. At this time, scholars in a variety of fields replaced a belief in the static order of nature with a concept of development over time. This historical approach—coupled with a belief that researchers in all disciplines should assiduously collect and analyze information in a scientific manner—revolutionized both the sciences and the humanities. While earlier amateurs had embellished their narratives and often concocted dialogue to re-create the essence of past events, the professional historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries embraced positivism and empiricism: They embarked upon a quest to accumulate 'facts,' those objective building blocks that would ultimately form the mansion of history. By emphasizing objectivity and documentation of sources in their scientific approach to history, these researchers condemned oral sources as

subjective and therefore unreliable.\(^2\)

Historians's attitudes changed during the twentieth century. Scholars discarded their absolute faith in positivism and their endless quest for objectivity. Relativists and revisionists shattered the artificial comity in the profession by asserting that all historians viewed events with certain prejudices and preconceived notions. Indeed, at any given time, a majority of intellectuals subscribed to an ever-changing world view and set of values; as the paradigm shifted, so did the cannons of scholarship. Although historians sought to approach objectivism in their narratives, they finally admitted that the subjective nature of their surroundings influenced their perspective. Historians and other social scientists could embrace oral history as a viable scholarly resource only after they acknowledged the subjective nature of almost all other sources.\(^3\)


\(^3\)Many historians continued to question the validity of oral history interviews. They asserted that such sources remain unreliable due to the supposed frailty of human memory and were therefore biased when compared with other sources. However, to condemn oral history in this fashion is to ignore the fallacies apparent in other sources. Written accounts also lack objectivity: reflective recollections in personal diaries may obscure the actual events; newspaper stories—often taken as unquestionable journalistic 'fact'—require examination and editing by many individuals before they reach their final form at the press; and rules and regulations promulgated by authorities received differing interpretations by counsel on opposite sides of the courtroom. Ironically, despite the obvious subjectivity inherent to the majority of resources used by historians, many scholars place less
Over the last fifty years, the practice of oral history has complemented changes within the historical profession and related social science disciplines. Pioneering efforts in this field began as Allan Nevins, a professor of history, assumed the directorship of the Oral History Research Office at Columbia University in the late 1940s. While early oral history interviews assumed the traditional elitist perspective that history amounted to the 'past politics' of 'great men,' the emphasis on political, military, and corporate elites changes as scholars continued to examine history within broader cultural themes. Just as many archives began to collect materials that represented most—if not all—facets of their constituent communities, local studies and 'nearby' oral histories have developed as historians attempted to ask big questions about small places and to document a variety of voices in the community. Indeed, some scholars have redefined their definition of oral history to include diverse archival materials that build upon and go beyond recorded and transcribed interviews. In addition, researchers have started to deconstruct and to examine the context of oral history discourse as a way of better understanding the relationships among participants in the oral history interview. Also, the development of enhanced technologies (such as inexpensive and easy-to-transport videocameras) has

validity in a recorded oral history interview than in a typed, verbatim transcript. See Novick, That Noble Dream. For further information on the concept of "paradigm shift" that has revolutionized scholarship in the sciences and humanities since the 1960s, see Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, 2d. ed., enlarged (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
continued to move the discipline beyond the reel-to-reel tape and black-and-white transcript of yesteryear to its multimedia potential.\(^4\)

The general acceptance of oral history has implications for librarians. Public, academic, special, and school libraries can play an important role in creating new primary source materials, offering access to present researchers, and curating the interviews for posterity. By the 1980s, a number of colleges and universities had developed oral history projects. At the University of South Florida (USF), for example, a silver anniversary oral history program attempted to document the development of the institution

and its role in the community by interviewing charter staff, faculty, and administrators. Over fifty interviews were recorded and transcribed during the summer and fall of 1985, and final copies were deposited in the University Archives at the Tampa Campus Library. Other than the records of this program and the handful of interviews contained within other manuscript collections at the Special Collections Department, the Tampa Campus Library made no specific plans to solicit, preserve, and promote independent research projects of students and faculty. Recognizing this important gap in the collection, the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library initiated an oral history program in the summer of 1992.  

"The Oral History of Modern America" at USF St. Petersburg

In July 1965, the University of South Florida inherited the former U. S. Maritime Service barracks along Bayboro Harbor. Three years later, officials at USF St. Petersburg established a small campus library after they acquired 200 discarded books from the Tampa campus. The collection has grown dramatically in the last twenty-eight years. Named after former St. Petersburg Times editor Nelson Poynter, the library currently contains approximately 165,000 books, 800+ active periodical subscriptions, and over 5,000 video titles, as well as a growing number of unique research materials. In August 1996, the library will resume operations in a new building that more than doubles available collection space. This three-story structure includes a state-of-the-art Instructional Media Services center and a Special Collections reading room. Both of these areas will embark upon a joint endeavor to nurture and expand an oral history program started by the campus library and the USF Department of History during the fall of 1992.

Mary Grigsby, then-director of the campus library, assembled a committee to examine the potential for collecting oral histories at the USF St. Petersburg library. In addition to Grigsby, committee members included Raymond O. Arsenault (USF professor of for the Small Academic Library, Greenwood Library Management Collection (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989). Contents of the USF Silver Anniversary Oral History Project reside in box 522 of the University Archives, Special Collections Department, University of South Florida, Tampa.
history), Betty Jean Miller (features writer for the St. Petersburg Times), David Shedden (librarian/archivist at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies), and Jim Schnur.

Each member brought a variety of experiences to committee meetings. As a former librarian at the State Historical Society of Missouri and an associate director of the journalism library at the University of Missouri-Columbia, Grigsby had provided both reference service and technical assistance for patrons who performed oral history interviews. Since the early 1980s, Arsenault has included an oral history component in many of his academic classes. As part of the exit requirements for these courses, students must complete at least one oral history interview and write a paper that either describes the session or places the interviewee within the historical context described in class lectures and readings. As a reporter on local issues and historical figures, Miller often recorded her interviews with long-time residents and civic leaders. Shedden played an important role in the Poynter Institute's Newsmakers oral history project and also published a guide for newspapers that sought to develop oral history programs. As a graduate student in history and library science, Schnur both performed oral history interviews on Florida history and sought to preserve them for future use.

The committee convened for an organizational meeting in August 1993. Just before the meeting, Arsenault had donated nearly 125 interviews to the Poynter library that formed a core oral history collection and Schnur secured a second subcollection of audiotapes
from the "Florida Report," a news and public affairs program formerly broadcast on WUSF radio. Committee members discussed collection parameters, technical services issues, and timelines for action and soon thereafter designed a collection development statement (Appendix 1) for dissemination to library staff, campus administrators, the Campus Advisory Board, and the Society for the Advancement of Poynter Library.6

Dimensions of an Oral History Collection Development Plan

The committee released its collection development statement in September 1993. Members agreed that the St. Petersburg campus should take the initiative to develop a comprehensive oral history program for the West Central region of Florida. None of the other USF libraries actively collected interviews aside from their institutional archives of lecturers and speakers. The University of Florida and the Florida State Archives represented the nearest comprehensive centers for oral history, and both of these centers had broader missions than preserving the regional history of the Tampa Bay area. The proposed oral history policy sought to preserve the history of the USF St. Petersburg campus, local and regional histories, and interviews that fell under other academic content areas supported by the curriculum (such as journalism, marine science, and education). In their discussions, committee

6Meeting minutes, USF St. Petersburg Oral History Committee, 24 August 1993.
members considered a number of interrelated issues, such as classroom instruction and community outreach; appraisal; acquisition; technical services (physical processing, arrangement, and description); public services (reference, security, and access); and conservation, preservation, and the importance of standards.

Classroom Instruction and Community Outreach

Archivists must become proactive rather than reactive. Few patrons will visit a repository if it resembles a closet for old, useless records. Staff must engage in outreach activities that allow others to learn about the archives, its purpose, and its holdings. Through outreach programs, the institution can promote and market its program (by indicating the value of oral history as a scholarly and community tool), encourage use of targeted collections (by describing oral interviews available at the facility), and cultivate potential donors for future collections. By October 1993, library staff had developed an oral history education component for students in Ray Arsenault's classes (Appendix 2). The resulting "Oral History Handbook" divided the oral history process into three essential areas. While preparing for the interview, students set goals by defining a broad research topic, evaluating potential interviewees, and examining secondary sources and other literature to gain a better understanding of the cultural context. This preparation phase also included the
scheduling of an interview session and a brief discussion of personal (review of scrapbooks and other related items), legal (release forms), and equipment needs (a working cassette recorder, blank tapes, an electric cord and/or fresh batteries, etc.). While conducting the interview, students learned to place their subjects at ease, foster an intellectual exchange through strong and open-ended questions, respect the opinions of their subjects, take copious notes, and monitor the equipment. After the interview, the students discovered proper ways to index, store, and preserve their interviews, as well as ways to incorporate oral memories into historical narratives.7

Classroom instruction and public lectures have enhanced the Oral History of Modern America Collection. Students received encouragement and learned proper interview techniques before they attempted their interviews. Library staff offered further assistance in person, by telephone, and through electronic messages. Lectures to civic groups and historical societies allowed members of these groups and the general public to discover the resources available at USF St. Petersburg. Library staff also designed a profile sheet to assess potential interviewees for the oral history collection (Appendix 3).8


8 A number of monographs provide suggestions for conducting oral history interviews. Willa K. Baum’s study serves as the standard for small and local historical societies. Donald Ritchie builds upon the work of Baum and other practitioners in his contribution to the Twayne’s Oral History series. In his book of essays, Michael Frisch examines the relationship between memory,
Appraisal of Interviews

In a university archives, an appraisal usually establishes intellectual rather than monetary value. Potential donations to the Oral History of Modern America archive should fall under the general areas designated under the collection development policy. The act of appraising materials in an archives continues long after the librarian places items in a collection. As available technologies and collection parameters change, the library staff must continuously re-evaluate how individual materials fit within institutional policies and objectives. All donations occupy precious space and cost money to maintain due to salaries, preservation needs, storage containers, and duplication and transcription costs.

The appraisal of all archival materials must consider three important factors at two distinct levels. **Evidential** value provides evidence of the creator's actions. For example, while many textbooks contain a copy of the Constitution, the original copy possesses unique, evidential, enduring, and historical value. **Informational** value emphasizes the importance of the content over the medium. Thus, some researchers might select a data file of a transcript over a typed document or the actual recording of the interview. As long as the researcher has the ability to obtain the requested information, the item retains value regardless of the format. **Administrative need** requires that certain materials remain in the collection for statutory reasons and institutional purposes. Appraisal originally occurs at the group level, and later at the subgroup or item level. For example, if a donor offered ten oral history recordings and only eight of the interviews fell within the purview of the collection development policy, the library would work with the donor to locate suitable repositories for the other two recordings.

**Acquisition of Interviews**

All oral history interviews added to the Poynter library require proper documentation. The **deed of gift** must cover five essential areas: 1) who donated the item, 2) who received the item, 3) what was transferred between the parties, 4) what conditions govern the transfer, and 5) what proves that the transaction
occurred. Deeds of gift for special collections must clearly specify what all parties intend to do, as well as stipulate any conditions or restrictions placed on the use of the collection.

Deed of gift requirements vary according to the source of the interview. All such instruments should provide the oral history interview as an unrestricted gift that transfers literary rights and copyright to the institution, while protecting the right of the interviewer and interviewee to have 'first use' of the contents therein. Oral histories donated by outside researchers require a minimum of a completed interviewee permission form and a letter of acknowledgement to the donor. Student interviews pose a special problem due to federal guidelines that mandate the confidentiality of certain academic records and assignments. When students in academic classes donate interviews, they include a second consent form that allows the library to share their interview with interested researchers in the same manner that a completed thesis or dissertation is cataloged, placed in a library's collection, and available for access to interested parties.

Legal and physical possession are different in nature. The original accession of oral history interviews included a number of audio cassettes that lacked any paper documentation. Although some of the participants cannot be located (or have perished), the library cannot assume that the contents of the tapes now fall under public domain. As resources permit, staff must continue to attempt to locate the interviewer, interviewee, and/or surviving members of their families.
Technical Services: Physical Processing

Audio and video recordings exist on volatile media. To preserve the intellectual contents of interviews in the Oral History of Modern America Collection, staff duplicate the master recording onto a cassette that serves as the working master for use and public access. The physical separation of the original tape from its copy offers an additional level of security. The original cassettes reside in separate document boxes that will remain in the closed stack area of the Special Collections reading room on the third floor of the new library. The working copy will be stored in the audio/visual archives area of the Instructional Media Services Department on the second floor.

Technical Services: Arrangement and Description

Arrangement refers to the act of confirming, imposing, or creating order within a collection. Whenever possible, library staff should attempt to maintain original order and provenance. Thus, if a student in Ray Arsenault's class conducts an interview with a member of the Poynter family, the tape will reside in the Oral History of Modern America Collection, not the Papers of Nelson Poynter. The library staff may establish relational links between and within collections through the online catalog and in-house database.

Description can occur through an individual item record, a
specific database, or a comprehensive finding aid. This guide should include a physical description that describes the organization and format of the material, a sketch of the creator that establishes provenance, and a scope and contents note that expresses relationships among items in the collection.

In 1993, staff designed a template for cataloging interviews on the Q&A database. Major descriptors included statement of provenance; biographical information about the interviewee and interviewer; subject descriptors, summary notes, and scope and contents information; contact information about the donor; and physical information about the tape and any related materials (research papers, releases, photographs, etc.) donated to the archives. Although staffing and budgetary limitations prevent the library from mounting individual interviews on the Library User Information System (LUIS), the library does plan to examine other options for sharing information about the Oral History of Modern America Collection. For example, descriptive information might be mounted on the future World Wide Web page for the Poynter library’s Special Collections area, either as a text file or via a search engine that can bridge between the Web software and a database residing on the server.9

9For an extended discussion of administrative concerns, the role and impact of new technologies, and financial issues that affect the move from collection management to ‘knowledge management,’ see Peggy Johnson and Bonnie MacEwan, eds., Collection Management and Development: Issues in an Electronic Era (Chicago: American Library Association, 1994).
Public Services: Reference, Security, and Access

Closed stacks and limited access mandate a strong commitment to reference services in an archival setting. Staff must understand the research process, attitudes, and goals of their constituency. In addition, the curator of oral histories should know the collection (information in the records), its provenance (information about the records), and other sources available (related information). Also, archival repositories should have reading room policies available for public inspection, as well as registration and security procedures (Appendix 4). Since it retains copyright for interviews added to the Oral History of Modern America collection, the campus library can provide reference services to distant clients that most archives generally avoid. For example, if researchers in other areas have an interest in consulting oral history interviews at USF St. Petersburg, they may submit their request and, since the university retains copyright, it may—at its discretion—send a dubbed copy of the interview to the researcher in exchange for a standard duplication fee and postage costs.10

10 For a variety of essays that evaluate the importance of reference and public services in an archival setting, see Lucille Whalen, ed., Reference Services in Archives (New York: Haworth Press, 1986)/
Conservation, Preservation, and the Importance of Standards

Audio and visual materials pose a variety of problems for archivists and special collections librarians. Early oral history programs often destroyed the recorded interviews after they produced a written transcript. The cost of storing and preserving the audio record remained prohibitive into the 1960s, until the advent of (relatively) inexpensive reel-to-reel and cassette recorders and other media equipment. The oral history initiative at USF St. Petersburg must account for present technology requirements as well as future enhancements that will affect access to the content of the interviews. Preservation dubbing, migration to new media forms, and provision for secure storage away from harmful electromagnetic fields require intensive staffing and funding resources. Archival staff must work closely with collection development and media service librarians, as well as a variety of other professionals, to ensure that the interviews retain their informational value.\(^\text{11}\)

As facilities migrate towards a virtual library setting, information professionals must consider technical and service standards that will maintain, promote, and enhance the oral history

\(^{11}\)Two important works that oral historians and archivists should examine are Frederick J. Stielow, The Management of Oral History Sound Archives (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986); and Alan Ward, A Manual of Sound Archive Administration (Brookfield, Vt.: Gower, 1990). Although somewhat dated, a good discussion of video technology and equipment appears in Brad Jolly, Videotaping Local History (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1988).
enterprise in the library setting. From tape to type to digital form, oral history materials and programs must be planned, produced, and preserved with special attention to industrial and archival standards that will allow future scholars to benefit from the voices of the past. Thus, as librarians at the University of South Florida re-examine the role of special collections in the virtual library, the Oral History of Modern America Collection must receive considerable attention.12

Concluding Thoughts

In August 1996, nearly 500 oral history interviews will move into the Special Collections area of the USF St. Petersburg library. The dramatic growth of this collection over the last three years—despite limited storage facilities and staffing—indicates the present and future potential of the Oral History of Modern America Collection in its new setting. As the Poynter library continues to expand and cultivate this important primary-source collection, staff must periodically re-examine its development within the context of the library’s and university’s mission statements and available resources.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDICES

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Oral History of Modern America

A Collection Development Initiative

Department of Special Collections
Nelson Poynter Memorial Library
University of South Florida at St. Petersburg

September 1993
PROPOSED COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT STATEMENT

In order to document the history of the USF St. Petersburg campus, the city of St. Petersburg, and Pinellas County, the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library will collect and preserve audiotapes of interviews of historical merit. Such oral history narratives provide a particularly vivid way to preserve the historic record of our community for the scholars of the future. The collection will focus on the following priorities:

1. To document the history of the USF St. Petersburg campus through interviews with individuals and recordings of significant campus events.

2. To record the history of the Poynter Library and the Society for the Advancement of Poynter Library.

3. To augment the historical record of the City of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County through interviews of community leaders and residents. The unique perspectives of the community's women and minority citizens will be especially valuable. Themes to be emphasized include the following:

   A. To move promptly to record the experiences of local residents who are World War II veterans, concentration camp survivors, or individuals with memories of the war's effect on the home front.
   B. To seek to document St. Petersburg's experience as a retirement community with a high percentage of older adults.
   C. To explore the impact of the area's high rate of regional migration and its accompanying social changes.
   D. To record the cultural and social history of tourism in the St. Petersburg area.

LIST OF PRELIMINARY FOCUS AREAS

USF St. Petersburg University Archives Collection
   History of the University of South Florida at St. Petersburg
   History of the Society for the Advancement of Poynter Library

Local and Regional Collections
   Ray Arsenault's Southern Oral History Collection
   Betty Jean Miller's News and Views Oral History Collection
   History of Early Residents
   History of the Local Black Community
   Regional Migration and Social Change
   Aging in America as Reflected in the Local Community
   Cultural and Social History of Tourism
   Sub-themes of Women and Minorities
   World War II and the Home Front in St. Petersburg
   Local Politics and Government

Journalism and Other Academic Content Areas
   "Florida Report" Audiotapes (beginning with January 1993)
   Interviews with Prominent Marine Scientists
   Other interviews related to the academic mission of our campus
POLICY STATEMENT

1. Subjects for the interviews will be carefully selected and interviewers will be prepared appropriately.

2. All subjects will sign a release form that assigns proprietary rights of the tapes and transcripts to the Poynter Library.

3. One copy of the interview will be provided without charge at the interviewee's request.

4. A working copy will be produced so the original tape may serve as an archive copy.

5. All tapes will have standardized labels with sensitized security strips. Storage units will meet archival standards.

6. We have designed an oral history database to provide access to the intellectual and bibliographic information about each interview.

7. In the future, information from the oral history database will be mounted onto the LUIS on-line library card catalog, allowing researchers throughout the world with Internet and Bitnet access to search by keyword.

8. External sources of support and grants will be solicited.

S.A.P.L. AND ORAL HISTORY

Members of SAPL can play an essential role in the development of our Oral History initiative. We welcome your ideas and comments for our program, and hope to include interviews of SAPL members as an integral part of our archives. For more information about the USF St. Petersburg Oral History Program, contact Jim Schnur, Special Collections Assistant, at 893-9125.
Oral History of Modern America

Intellectual Relationship of Oral History Interviews within Special Collections
by James A. Schnur

USF St. Petersburg University Archives Collection

Interviews of USF St. Petersburg Campus Community, SAPL

ORAL HISTORY OF MODERN AMERICA

Interviews of Residents in the Tampa Bay Area

Local and Regional Print, Manuscript, and Media Collections

Other Collection Development Areas (within Oral History circle):
- history of early residents
- history of black community
- regional migration and social change
- aging in the local community
- cultural and social history of tourism
- gender and ethnicity
- local politics and government
- World War II and St. Petersburg
- popular and mass culture

Journalism and Other Academic Content Areas

“Florida Report” Collection; other interviews

Ray's Southern Oral History Collection
Betty Jean's "Times" Collection, etc.
**ORAL HISTORY OF MODERN AMERICA**

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<th>Name of Interviewee</th>
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**PRINCIPAL PLACES OF RESIDENCE** (List present place first)

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**PRINCIPAL OCCUPATIONS** (List most recent career first)

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In view of the historical value of this interview, I, ____________________________, do hereby give to the University of South Florida at St. Petersburg for such scholarly and educational uses the University shall determine the tape-recorded interview(s) recorded on __________________________ as an unrestricted gift. I knowingly and voluntarily transfer to the University of South Florida at St. Petersburg legal title and all literary property rights including copyright. This gift does not preclude any use which I may want to make of the information in the recordings myself. This agreement may be revised or amended by mutual consent of the undersigned parties.

Signature of Interviewee

Date of Interview

Location of Interview

Signature of Interviewer

Name of Interviewer

Institutional Affiliation of Interviewer
Oral History Handbook

Compiled by Jim Schnur

Oral History of Modern America

Department of Special Collections
Nelson Poynter Memorial Library
University of South Florida at St. Petersburg
materials that will help them recall events. The interviewee should also feel free to consult personal materials during the actual interview session.

Step 3: Before you Leave Home

1. **Do your homework.** Formulate an outline or a variety of questions based upon your research of the time period or topic. Avoid tightly written scripts that will make the interview session appear rigid. Select questions that fill gaps found in the historical record. For example, instead of asking a former Senator about the final disposition of a certain bill (information that already appears in the Journal of the Senate), ask the Senator to discuss the numerous sessions and debates involved in the lawmaking process. Use the interview as a way to obtain "inside information" unavailable from other sources, or for clarification when different resources offer conflicting accounts.

2. **Make sure you have everything you will need before departing.** At a minimum, you should have the following:

   a. A cassette recorder in good working condition with a power supply cord and/or fresh batteries. Test the equipment before you leave your house. Check for sound quality. If possible, use an external microphone with good sound fidelity. Select a machine with good recording capability; you can always play the tapes on a different machine. Examine the machine for dust or other particles that may damage the recording heads or compromise the sound quality.

   b. A supply of new, unused, high-quality audiocassettes. Avoid using miniature or microcassettes; changes in technology may render them obsolete (remember 8-track tapes?). Refrain from purchasing low-quality cassettes assembled with inferior materials, or longer, extended play tapes (like C-120s). Whenever possible, use the thickest tapes available, the C-60s, which have 30 minutes of recording time on each side. Longer playing cassettes have thinner tapes which may cause the sound to echo or "bleed through" on the other side.

   c. A blank release form that, when completed, will transfer legal title and literary rights to the Special Collections Department of the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library.

   d. Any research notes, questions, or other materials that will prove essential.

Act II: Conducting the Interview

Step 1: Before Pressing the 'RECORD' Button

1. **Test the equipment one last time.** Does the cassette recorder work? Is the tape in the machine?

2. **Place the interviewee at ease.** Take the interviewee to a quiet place away from unnecessary interruptions. Meet with the interviewee on a one-to-one basis. Third parties—whether spouses, friends, and relatives—may distract the interviewee. If your subject feels nervous or uncomfortable, you may want to hide the machine or start the recorder and talk about mundane matters: the weather, a recent sports event, or some other item that will "break the ice." You should quickly establish a strong rapport as the interviewee no longer fears the tape recorder's presence.
Step 2: The Main Event

1. **Identify yourself on tape.** When starting the tape, allow for 5 to 10 seconds of silence, then identify the contents of the tape. For example: "This is tape number one of my interview with John Smith, former Peace Corps Volunteer. My name is Tom Jones, and I am conducting this interview on November 5, 1993, at the home of Mr. Smith . . ." Biographical questions usually follow such introductory remarks.

2. **Foster an intellectual exchange through strong questions.** Ask only one question at a time and keep it brief in length. Do not overwhelm or confuse the interviewee by posing a series of involved, lengthy questions. Establish a strong rapport with the speaker before asking questions of a delicate or controversial nature. Formulate questions in a way that will encourage honest, detailed responses. To ask: "I thought the Senator was a generous and kind person. What did you think of him?" would place the subject in an awkward position. As an alternative, you may instead make the statement: "Despite the Senator's strong support in the community, I hear he was a difficult person to work for." This assertion allows the Senator's supporters to offer a lengthy and illuminating defense, while critics will reply by expanding upon your statement.

3. **Include open-ended questions.** Your questions should include general, short answer questions (e.g., "What year did you enlist in the military?") as well as broader, open-ended questions (e.g., "How has the field of education changed since the 1968 teacher walkout?"). Although you will have some general biographical and topical questions that you may use in future interviews, you should also think about specific questions that address each interviewee's personal experiences and unique vantage point.

4. **Feel free to deviate from the script.** Spontaneity adds zest to the interview and may rekindle otherwise forgotten memories. Show interest and listen carefully. You must play a delicate balancing act: Allow the interviewee to pause and reflect, yet try to keep the interview on track. Never blurt out your next question at the first moment of silence, but steer the conversation away from long-winded responses that venture far from the subject at hand. Interrupt occasionally with new questions or guiding comments that evolve during the course of the interview, but never interrupt the flow of a good story! For example, to get an interview back on track and to get an answer to a question the interviewee seems to have avoided, you may say: "That is very interesting, Mr. Smith. However, before we move on, could you tell me about your first assignment in the Peace Corps?"

5. **Respect the opinions of your interviewees.** Your subjects may express views that contradict with your beliefs. However, avoid imposing presentist standards or criticism on historical actors. For example, if you interview former members of the Ku Klux Klan, try to understand what motivated them to participate in the Klan and ask questions about the structure of the organization. Refrain from asking unfair questions such as: "Why did you associate with closed-minded, hooded fascists?" By challenging their value system or attempting to convert them to your set of beliefs, you will merely alienate your participants and discourage them from sharing their honest reflections. If you believe an account is not accurate, you might say "I have heard that the governor intended to fire the striking teachers.", etc. Such a response does not challenge the individual, but instead offers an opportunity for further clarification. If discrepancies remain, compare the interviewee's statement with information garnered from other sources after the session has ended. Remember, the subject's statement may be an inaccurate representation of the larger picture, but a truthful recollection of what was witnessed from a limited perspective.
6. **Keep the interview "in the Sunshine."** During oral history interviews, subjects may occasionally ask you to place personal information under seal or restriction until a later date. While you must always respect confidentiality and "off the record" information, you should remind the interviewee of the value of their narrative and try to keep the recorder turned on as much as possible. Oral history is of little value if present and future researchers cannot gain access to the materials. If the interviewee seeks to close or restrict access to the material—of if you believe some contents of the interview could place the subject in a compromising position—place the terms of the restriction on the release form. Make the period of restriction as short as possible and use specific language such as: "Closed until October 1, 1994." Avoid vague and unenforceable stipulations, such as "Open only to qualified researchers with a legitimate interest." (How do you differentiate between qualified and unqualified researchers, and what constitutes legitimate interest?) Discourage restrictions or the use of pseudonyms whenever possible.

7. **Do not steal the show.** You should allow the interviewee an opportunity to tell a complete story, rather than force him or her into a balanced dialog. Remember to keep the subject as the focus of the interview; do not use the oral history interview as the place to flaunt your expert knowledge. Avoid wasting this rare opportunity to preserve someone's memories by becoming a compulsive talker or overbearing director. Allow the interviewee to do most of the talking. Compulsive talkers ask lengthy questions or offer thorough commentary, thereby forcing the interviewee to compete with the interviewer for air time. Directors encourage interviewees to offer only those responses that reaffirm their own world view. They guide subjects into the trap of reinforcing stereotypes by making incorrect statements during the interview.

8. **Take copious notes and watch the tape counter.** While the tape recorder may preserve the verbal interchange, do not rely on it to capture the essence of the interview. During the oral history session, the course of the interview may generate other ideas, potential subjects, or new questions. Listing names, places, dates, or themes of special interest during the interview serves two essential purposes: It gives you an opportunity to make note of important thoughts during long pauses in the conversation, and provides an index to the flow and contents of the oral history session. This index will allow library staff to assign subject headings when cataloging the interviews without having to listen to the entire contents of the tape. Whenever possible, use a tape recorder with a timer or counter, so you can keep track of memorable quotes or concepts. If your recorder does not have a counter, you may want to wear a watch so you can write down the approximate time(s) of important portions of the dialogue. Remember that no two tape counters operate at precisely the same speed.

9. **Keep an eye on the tape.** Do not lose the best part of the interview by forgetting to monitor the tape. You may have to ask your subject to pause briefly while you turn over or replace the cassette. Avoid asking deep, thought-provoking questions just before the end of the tape. After replacing the tape, remember to leave some blank tape at the beginning and once again identify the contents, as well as the matter under discussion: "This is tape 2, side 2 of Tom Jones's interview of John Smith. You were telling us about your involvement with the Peace Corps in Nigeria. How did Nigerians respond to your agricultural development program?"

**Step 3: Concluding the Interview**

1. **Any last thoughts?** Before you stop the tape, give the interviewee an opportunity to share any thoughts or have closure on any issues discussed during the interview. Also, thank your subject for agreeing to participate before you end the interview.
2. Collect related items, if possible. The interviewee may have illustrative materials that might be assist future researchers, such as clippings, printed materials, correspondence, or photographs. If possible, obtain copies of any materials that would allow others to place this interview within its proper historical context. You may even want to take a photograph of the narrator after the interview has ended, if he or she grants permission to do so.

ACT III: After the Interview

Step 1: Safeguard your Oral History Narrative

1. Label and secure your tape. Place a label on both the cassette and its container that indicates the following information: names of interviewer and interviewee(s), the date, the tape number (if you used more than one tape), and the approximate length of the interview. Listen to a few minutes of the tape to verify sound quality. On the top of the cassette, you will notice two plastic tabs. Remove these tabs from the tape to ensure that you never record over the interview.

2. Store the tape in a safe place. Never keep audiocassettes—or any media items for that matter—in areas where they may encounter excessive fluctuations in temperature or humidity, direct exposure to the sunshine, or electromagnetic radiation. Place tapes, computer disks, and other volatile media in cool, dry areas away from natural pollution (such as dirt and dust) and electronic interference (such a microwaves, vacuum cleaners, etc.).

Step 2: Make an Index of the Session

1. List the contents or major issues discussed on the tape. You should do at least a "rough and dirty" index as soon as possible. For example, a time segment index of an interview may appear as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Side one of tape</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Side two of tape</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>:00</td>
<td>Biographical info; childhood info</td>
<td>:00</td>
<td>Race relations in Tallahassee (cont’d.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:05</td>
<td>Race relations in Tampa</td>
<td>:08</td>
<td>Gov. Claude Kirk and teachers’ strike</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:11</td>
<td>High school activism (1961-65)</td>
<td>:13</td>
<td>Kirk on education unions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:14</td>
<td>Joined Young People's Socialist League at FSU (1965-68)</td>
<td>:15</td>
<td>Bob Martinez and union officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:19</td>
<td>Student protests</td>
<td>:20</td>
<td>Changes in the civil rights movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:23</td>
<td>Gov. Farris Bryant and students</td>
<td>:21</td>
<td>Kirk on school desegregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:27</td>
<td>Race relations in Tallahassee</td>
<td>:24</td>
<td>Concluding remarks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>:26</td>
<td>End of interview</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Provide a copy of the release form(s) and written indexes when you submit your audiocassettes. The Special Collections staff will use your rough index to form subject headings that will identify your tape as a unique item in our collection. For example, from the above index, possible Library of Congress subject headings for cataloging this sample interview include:

Tampa (Fla) -- Race Relations
Tallahassee (Fla) -- Race Relations
Kirk, Claude R.

School Integration -- Florida
Student Movements
Bryant, Cecil Farris
Step 3: Incorporate Oral History into Your Research

1. *Exercise the same caution with oral histories as with other primary sources.* Similar to books and printed archival materials, the contents of oral histories remain inherently subjective. As students of history, we must examine and incorporate a variety of primary and secondary sources into our research process. While interviewees offer only whatever information they chose to share—and may intentionally withhold or distort evidence—similar inaccuracies appear in many written accounts.

2. *Proper use and citation validates the integrity of oral history as a source.* Despite our culture's emphasis on the written word, oral history plays a prominent role in historical scholarship. Never misrepresent the interviewee's intentions by recklessly reinforcing stereotypes or by taking comments out of their proper context.

   **Examples of Citations for Oral History Interviews**

   *To cite your interviews in a footnote or endnote:*

   Charles P. Quillen, Interview by author, Tape recording, St. Augustine, Fla., 5 November 1993.

   *To cite this interview again within the same paper:*

   Charles Quillen interview, 5 November 1993.

   *To cite your interview in your bibliography:*

   Quillen, Charles P. Interview by author. 5 November 1993. St. Augustine, Fla.

   *To cite interviews in our Oral History of Modern America collection in footnotes/endnotes:*

   Frances M. Jackson, Interview by Rita J. Greenwood, 7 June 1992, Interview 92-007, "Oral History of Modern America" Collection, Nelson Poynter Memorial Library Special Collections Department, University of South Florida, St. Petersburg.

   After your first citation, you may simply use:


   *To cite interviews in our collection in your bibliography:*


Good luck with your interviews. Call me at 893-9125 if you need assistance. 10/1993 jas
ORAL HISTORY OF MODERN AMERICA
Special Collections and Archives
USF St. Petersburg Library

PROFILE SHEET FOR POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEE

Name: ________________________________ Phone: ____________________

Address: __________________________ _ Source: ___________________

Area(s) of Expertise:

******************************************************************* CONTACT INFORMATION

Introductory Letter: Date
Telephone Call: Time
Preliminary Visit: Materials Received
Interview 1:
Interview 2:
Follow-up Letter:

Other Information:
Welcome to Special Collections at the Nelson Poynter Memorial Library, University of South Florida at St. Petersburg. Researchers may examine materials in Special Collections after completing a registration form and agreeing to abide by the following regulations, which serve to protect and to ensure the integrity of our materials for future scholars.

1. Complete the Research Registration Form and provide appropriate identification (such as a driver's license, USF identification card, etc.). While Special Collections reserves the right to use data from this form for statistical purposes, all personal information—including materials loaned—will remain confidential in accordance with Florida statutes and university guidelines.

2. Leave all briefcases, bags, or other personal property at the entrance to the reading room. Only pencils, paper, and lap-top computers are permitted. Special Collections staff forbid the use of any type of ink pen or permanent pencil, and reserve the right to inspect all articles used at the tables.

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4. The use of certain items may be restricted by statute, by office of origin, or by other restrictions. The researcher assumes full responsibility for fulfilling the terms connected with any restricted material. For the protection of the collections, staff members reserve the right to restrict access to records that require further arrangement, description, processing, or conservation, or additional security due to exceptional value. In some cases, copies may be substituted for originals.

5. Handle materials with the utmost care. Refrain from adding or erasing any marks. Avoid making any tracings, rubbings, or other drawings that will damage the integrity of the original. Keep manuscripts, photographs, and other items flat on the table—and handle brittle books with additional care—to prevent tears, creases, or damage to the spine. In certain cases, researchers may be required to wear gloves or to examine copies to protect the original materials.

6. Maintain the exact order of materials in folders, and of folders in boxes. Do not remove materials from more than one folder at a time. If you discover a mistake in the arrangement of items, please notify a staff member. Never attempt to rearrange materials or to change the order of items in a collection.

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FLORIDA PRESERVES

The Oral History of Modern America can be examined at the USF St. Petersburg Campus Nelson Poynter Memorial Library. A collection of 100 oral history interviews was donated by USF history professor Dr. Ray Arsenault and form the core of a 225 interview special collection. The interviews document the history of the St. Petersburg campus as well as

CLASSIC EVENT

President Betty Castor hosted the first Florida Classic President’s Reception in honor of Frederick Humphries of Florida A&M University and Oswald Bronson of Bethune-Cookman College to kick off the annual game of one of the state’s oldest football rivalries.

Castor announced that USF’s Institute on Black Life had agreed to conduct an economic impact study of the Classic. She then emphasized the university’s continued support of the Florida Classic by officially making the President’s Reception an annual event.

A LIFE THAT ADDED UP

Kent Nagle, USF professor of mathematics, died of cancer on Oct. 20. He was still teaching days before his death. His enthusiasm for mathematics touched thousands of students and hundreds of youngsters in the Tampa Bay Area.

In addition to the courses he taught at USF, he lectured to 60 groups of public school teachers about teaching math. He ran a summer math and science program in three counties for bright high school students. He created math anxiety workshops. To demonstrate the university’s appreciation for his contributions, President Betty Castor promised Nagle and his wife, shortly before his death, that their two sons could attend USF tuition-free. A memorial scholarship fund for mathematics has also been established through the USF Foundation.

ARCHITECTURE ALONE

USF now has a freestanding master of architecture program. The program received approval from the Board of Regents at its recent November meeting held at USF. It was previously established as a cooperative with Florida A&M University in 1986. It is the first SUS architecture program located in a metropolitan area. The program currently enrolls 112 students and already has graduated 28. The master plan for the program projects a future enrollment of 228 full-time equivalent students and its own building on the Tampa campus.