

HANDBOOK FOR ORAL HISTORY
IN THE
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

(DRAFT)

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PREFACE/ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I. INTRODUCTION

What is Oral History?

Oral history can be defined in various ways. Traditionally oral history is defined as a primary resource document created in an interview setting with an individual who has witnessed or participated in a historical event with the goal of collecting and preserving that individual's first-hand information and making it available to future researchers. It is an individual's spoken memories, personal commentaries, recollections, perspectives, interpretations, and narrative accounts of events and experiences. It is a structured conversation or dialogue between at least two individuals, an interviewer and interviewee, about some significant aspect of the past. The interviewer's questions and the interviewee's responses shape each other. Oral history then is a research **process** that involves collaboration between interviewers and interviewees who revisit the past, but it is also a **product** in the form of handwritten notes, videotapes, or audio recordings. An interview need not be recorded to be oral history.

Whether planning an oral history project, conducting interviews, or using the products of oral history, it is important to understand both the strengths and weaknesses of oral history. It is an excellent tool and process for collecting personal accounts as historical documents. Oral history often records perspectives and experiences not normally documented, with an emphasis on the human experience, and can open up new sources of knowledge. It captures and preserves the perspectives of those in power and the decision-making process, as well as the perspectives and lives of populations that have been underrepresented in the written record. However, oral history interviews are generally not the best way to acquire certain kinds of factual information, such as specific dates or places because individuals frequently fail to recall these details accurately. More traditional historical sources such as newspapers, archives, and park files are often more reliable, accurate sources for this.

The term oral history has sometimes been used interchangeably with terms such as oral traditions, oral testimony, and folklore. These terms are derived primarily from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, and folklore studies. While oral traditions, oral testimony, and folklore all involve similar interviewing techniques, they are distinctly different from oral history in their purpose, process, standards, and product. Oral history deals with first hand knowledge, while oral traditions deals with recollections of the distant past, passed from generation to generation. Oral history focuses on personal memories and accounts of events and experiences that occurred during the lifetime of the person being interviewed. This handbook is devoted primarily to the practice of oral history, not oral traditions or folklore.[\[1\]](#)

Oral history can be a valuable, important research method. It is especially useful for learning about people's perceptions about a historic event or their associations with park resources, and for gaining information that is generally not available in the written record. Interviews can be particularly useful in situations where written documents are lacking, particularly in this age where so much is communicated by phone or electronic mail. Oral history is a unique resource that has given a voice to those who were frequently overlooked in the past such as women, minorities, immigrants, and the disenfranchised, and it incorporates everyday experiences into the written record. It has helped give voice to Native peoples, African Americans, and other groups whose past was often presented and interpreted by cultural outsiders.

Oral history interviews can help explain the thoughts and reasons behind human action and contribute to a fuller, more accurate picture of the past. In some instances, oral history interviews provide park staff with their only source of information about a particular site, event, or individual. Moreover, the statements of actual participants in a historical event bring realism and immediacy to a historic site, event, resource, or collection of artifacts. Interviews can help give perspective to written sources, provide context, and fill in gaps. They can provide rare insight into the decision-making process and also capture deeply embedded cultural values and perspectives.

- Oral history helps us achieve the ultimate goal of preserving the nation's heritage. In addition to advancing historical research, oral history can foster a deeper appreciation for diverse, little known, or in some instances vanishing ways of life, particularly with Native communities.
- It can help identify places that require special care or consideration in management decisions.
- It can verify the authenticity of events and sites that cannot be determined by more traditional methods of historical research.
- Using oral history allows us to capture and preserve important aspects of a human experience that would otherwise go undocumented.
- Oral history helps transmit knowledge from one generation to the next and opens up new avenues for research.
- Oral history helps park staffs to demonstrate to associated communities that they are genuinely interested in their histories and perspectives.

Although oral history provides all the advantages mentioned above, remember that it is just one implement in the historian's, anthropologist's, or other professional's toolbox. No matter how thorough and successful the interview or interviews, they are no substitute for archival research and other means of investigation.

Oral History in the National Park Service

Oral history is directly linked to the National Park Service's basic mission of preserving and protecting park natural and cultural resources and educating the public about those resources. Since its inception, the National Park Service has had a unique and important role in documenting and preserving the nation's cultural and historical memory. Oral history has long been an invaluable tool for performing this role.

Park oral history projects and programs vary greatly in size, scope, and objectives. Park Service rangers, interpreters, historians, archeologists, ethnographers, curators, and historical and cultural landscape architects collect and use oral history to document the history of the parks and park resources, as well as the people and events that the parks commemorate. They use it to document the lives and cultures of the people associated with the parks and to provide important information about properties, landscapes, and structures within park boundaries. Parks can use oral history to determine how a specific site or object was used, identify people traditionally associated with a park site, or learn why and how park officials adopted a particular policy. Oral history is used to document the events, people, and resources associated with National Historic Landmarks and the National Register of Historic Places.

Oral history is a particularly useful tool for parks commemorating recent events, where witnesses are still living. The Service increasingly uses oral history to give voice to those who

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have been silenced, ignored, or overlooked. Some of the Service's more recent oral history projects such as the ones at Nicodemus National Historic Site, Manzanar National Historic Site, Women's Rights National Historical Park, and the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site highlight the perspectives and often the contributions of women, minorities, and the disenfranchised. The Ellis Island Oral History Project collects and records the personal perspectives and experiences of immigrants.

Park staffs use oral history to support their interpretive programs and to create interpretive products such as exhibits, movies, and videos shown in visitor centers, museums, and elsewhere. At Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site, Statue of Liberty National Monument, and many other Park Service units, the staffs incorporate excerpts from oral history interviews into park interpretation. Statements by people who were actual participants in a historical event or movement bring realism and immediacy to a collection of "artifacts." When the recording is done with the knowledge that eventually someone may edit the tape and play it back for the public, a different quality and approach are required than when recording simply to gather information. For maximum impact, first person stories should have a quality of realism and intimacy not always found in oral history recordings, and which require the highest quality equipment available as well as knowledge and experience in the use of that equipment.

The National Park Service uses oral history interviews to support administrative history in individual parks, in regional and support offices, and in its service centers. Interviews with current and former park service managers and staff provide rich source material for park administrative histories, just as interviews with former directors, planners and policy makers enrich Service-wide administrative history. Park Service employees use oral history in published park histories, park historical resource studies, and in Service-wide administrative histories. Oral history interviews can augment park files and in some instances might be the only way to document important aspects of a park's history.

Oral history is used to document the history of individual parks and the National Park Service as a federal agency. It is also used to document the events or people that parks commemorate such as Dwight D. Eisenhower, Carl Sandburg, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Orville and Wilbur Wright. Projects are sometimes designed to determine the contributions that individuals made to a movement such as civil rights and women's rights or to trace the impact of a movement such as homesteading or steam era railroad industry on individuals and communities. Interviews with park staff, local community representatives, and others can provide useful information for park planning.

Park staffs have often done oral history in conjunction with their various history studies. Oral history helps historical architects and others gather the details of day-to-day life in historic buildings or at historic sites – to recreate period furnishings and decorations by interviewing those associated with that building during a particular era. Oral history interviews can be a useful tool in the historic landscape documentation process. The National Register documentation process may occasionally involve the use of oral history.[\[2\]](#)

Anthropologists use oral history to collect individual life histories, migration histories, histories of extended families or communities, and histories of tribal settlement. They use it to document and interpret the traditional uses of particular objects, artifacts, and culturally significant places. Oral history also helps them identify and document subsistence practices of Native Alaskans as required by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 and to meet requires of the American Indian Religious Freedom Act of 1978, as amended in 1994.[\[3\]](#) Archeologists use oral history to get information about the use of natural resources, changes to the cultural landscapes, the locations of demolished buildings, and the development of historic districts. They also use it to identify sites, often by visiting a particular place or area with the interviewee. They can frequently gain insights into prehistoric practices, priorities, and sites through more current practices and decision-making. Interviews also provide accounts of how a certain process was implemented or a technology was performed. Staffs use oral history to document ritual performance, interpret artifacts and for life histories of the people who used a site or of park archeologists and cultural resource managers. Oral history helps the Service develop interpretive programs that are rooted in a solid knowledge of the culture or cultures involved.

Oral history can be extremely useful in implementing management policies related to park planning, cultural resource management, and education, community relations, and interpretation.

I While Service historians, ethnographers, and archeologists use different interviewing techniques and methodologies, there is much they can learn from each other and contribute to each other. Oral history projects that draw on a range of professionals and are rooted in a multi-disciplinary approach can provide the richest resources. Methodology aside, all these disciplines operate under the same overarching goal – to document and preserve our unique cultural heritage.

II. ORGANIZING AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Initially, doing oral history might seem much easier, less time consuming, and more cost effective than other methods of conducting historical research. This impression is usually false. Oral history is not always the most appropriate or least expensive method for researching a particular topic or individual. Sometimes written sources will provide more complete and accurate information. As noted earlier, oral history is an excellent tool for learning about a person's life and career and documenting an individual's involvement in or perspective on historical events. However, detailed information about specific names, dates, and events can be difficult to substantiate in oral history interviews, because people often confuse them so easily. Not only is the research in the written sources (and quite possibly also in photographs, buildings, and artifacts) still necessary in order to get oral history worth recording on tape, but conducting the interview is only a small part of an oral history project. At a minimum the interview recording should be indexed and properly preserved, and if possible it should be put into written form.

Careful planning is critical to the success of any oral history project. Insufficient or inadequate planning can make even a simple project difficult or lead to less than satisfactory results. Ideally, the planning should be done long before the actual interview process begins. Park staff should think as broadly as possible in designing oral history projects and when appropriate should consult with local communities or with experts in various other disciplines such as historians, ethnographers, or archeologists. For example, an archeologist conducting oral history interview with park neighbors may have questions about the changing use of the landscape and the locations of demolished buildings. In this instance, the archeologist could perhaps benefit from discussing the project with historians, ethnographers, cultural landscape specialists, and even natural resource specialists to see if there are other questions to ask of the interviewees. Representatives in these disciplines might not be immediately available at individual parks, but park staff can contact Service historians, ethnographers, and archeologists in the regional offices, support offices, or in Washington, D.C. for advice and assistance.

Establish Goals and Objectives

The first, and arguably most important, step in planning an oral history project is to establish clear, reasonable goals and objectives. Establishing clearly defined goals is a critical step because it will affect all other aspects of the project. The project goals will to a large extent determine the subject, scope, and methodology of the project. They will have a huge impact on the substance and quality of the information collected and on the ultimate success of the project. Even if the "project" consists of only a single interview, the goals should be clearly defined.

A park interested in initiating an oral history project may want to begin by assembling an advisory committee to help guide the project. An effective committee may be made up of respected scholars or administrators from within and outside the Service, perhaps academics from a local university, who are familiar with the subject and the people involved. It may also include an oral historian or a professional interviewer to advise on the interviewing process and techniques. An advisory committee could also include representatives of the communities or organizations that might be the focus of a particular project. The committee can help determine project goals, provide direction, and identify prospective interviewees. It also may lend greater legitimacy to a planned project and provide a broad base of support – something that might be helpful in obtaining funding.

The more the project is focused on specific goals, the easier it is to accumulate unique accounts that together illustrate the broader themes of history. Although the natural tendency is to try to interview as many people as possible, with this approach park staff risk overwhelming the available resources. Less can often be better. A carefully planned, thoughtful approach will likely result in more in-depth interviews and ultimately more useful information. Having said that, there is also a need for balance. Ideally, projects need to make the best use of the funds available by recording focused, well-planned interviews. However, parks are often faced with the reality that if they did not interview certain individuals, particularly those who are elderly, their perspectives will never be recorded for posterity. In some instances, an imperfect interview that has not been transcribed might be better than no interview at all.

It is important to define the nature and scope of what you want to research. Some of the questions that must be addressed in defining the project include the following:

- Is using oral history the most appropriate and effective approach?
- What information--both general and specific--do you seek from your interviewees?
- What basic questions do you want to address? Do you want to learn about their lives (biographical) or about a more general subject (topical)? For example, will the project focus on the life of Dwight D. Eisenhower (by interviewing family members and colleagues perhaps) or will it document how the Eisenhower farm became part of the National Park Service?
- How large will your project be? How many interviews (or hours of tape) do you hope to produce?
- What staff and financial resources will you need? What staff and financial resources are available?
- What are the other sources of documentation for your questions? What historical research or oral history interviews have already been done and how can they be incorporated?
- It is a good idea to focus on collecting information that is not already available elsewhere. How will the interviews be used? What kind of product do you want to create and for what purpose? What do you want to do with the information? Will the information on the tapes be background for a research project or part of an audio-visual program? An audio-visual program or exhibit will require higher quality sound and visual images than interviews used for research.
- ___What will become of the completed tapes? How will the tapes be processed and preserved? How will they be made available to researchers?

After establishing clear goals, it is helpful to outline the specific objectives that will allow you to achieve those goals. The objectives should address the more detailed aspects of editing the material, disseminating the tapes and transcripts that are collected, and incorporating them in an archival collection.

As important as defining project goals can be, it is also important to be flexible. It will become necessary to re-evaluate and modify the goals during the course of conducting interviews. Some of the original objectives might prove impractical or the interviews might open new avenues for study.

Determine Staff Requirements

After establishing the goals and objectives, the next step is to determine the staff resources required. How many interviewers, transcribers, and perhaps editors will be needed to complete the project in the time required? Will the park or other sponsor use park staff, contractors, or volunteers to conduct the interviews or transcribe the tapes? Does the park or project planner wish to hire a professional interviewer? The availability of funds will to some extent determine the number and make up of the project staff.

A paid staff will generally provide the most consistent, high quality interviews and provide greater continuity for the project. The interviewer need not be a paid professional, but should have a clear speaking voice and, more important, be a good listener who can adjust his or her individual style so as to put the interviewee at ease. The interviewer should also be firm enough to guide the interview effectively and keep it within the planned lines of inquiry. He or she should also be knowledgeable about the subject and flexible enough to recognize when the interviewee is

offering unplanned but valuable information. Experienced interviewers from outside the subject area will need to do extensive research on the subject matter. By contrast, inexperienced interviewers who are familiar with the subject matter will often need training in interview techniques and should become familiar with the ethical and legal considerations related to oral history.

Select the interviewer or interviewers with care. Good oral history is often the result of a rapport or bond that develops between the interviewer and the interviewee. This bond is born of mutual respect, trust, understanding, and shared experiences or interests. Both parties must share an appreciation for the lessons of the past and an appreciation for the importance of the project itself. If the interviewer is not genuinely interested in the subject, the project will suffer.

In instances where interviews will be done with individuals whose primary language is not English, project planners will need to provide for and fund translators and/or interpreters. Look for a translator or interpreter who has vocabulary consistent with the project goals, is familiar with cultural speech conventions, and has the ability to write in the native language and translate accurately and objectively. Careful transcription is critical to preparing an accurate translation. See Appendix E for more information on translation and transcription.

Identify Potential Interviewees

The scope and subject of the project (and perhaps the budget) will to some extent determine who should be interviewed. It is difficult to generalize about how to identify potential interviewees. There are no hard and fast rules. Many different kinds of people make good interviewees. Above all, prospective interviewees should be knowledgeable about the subject of the project and have something to contribute. In addition, interviewees should have the ability to speak clearly enough to be understood, have a reliable memory, be willing and able to respond to questions, have an interest in the subject, and have significant experiences or insights to share. The health or age of the interviewee can be a factor in determining who should be interviewed and how soon. The advisory committee, if you have one, should be able to help identify potential interviewees.

Try to be as comprehensive and inclusive as possible in identifying prospective interviewees. In some cases, additional interviewees might be needed to corroborate the data of principal interviewees or fill in gaps of information. In planning, schedule time for both primary and secondary interviews. Analyze your topic from various perspectives and then find individuals who can speak to all sides of the story. For example, on some topics, you will want to incorporate the views of park neighbors as well as park staff. Incorporate interviewees who provide different perspectives and address different aspects of the subject. As you begin conducting interviews, consider asking your interviewees to recommend other individuals who might also be good sources. Newspapers, local libraries and archives, park files, and county histories can also be used in identifying prospective interviewees.

Equipment

Traditionally, oral history has been done with audiotape recorders, but new technologies have emerged and are being used with increasing frequency, such as video and digital recorders. There are many options to consider when selecting equipment. The most critical considerations should be the expected life of the equipment and the anticipated long-term ability to retrieve the sound. Careful thought about the nature and purpose of the project and the long-term needs for retrieving and using the recorded voices will help you determine the type of recording equipment that is best suited for your particular project. Since equipment costs vary greatly, often the project budget will also be a determining factor. Equipment is not an area of the budget where project planners should seek to cut costs. The quality of the equipment will have a huge impact on the long-term value of the project.

A great many recording media are used for gathering oral history, including motion pictures, videotape and audiotape. For the vast majority of interviews the choice will be audio recording, but there are still choices to be made. Recording options include reel-to-reel analog, cassette tape, or digital recorders. Be careful to adopt only those technologies that adequately

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concerning equipment, as can archivists in the National Park Service's headquarters and regional offices, professional organizations such as the Oral History Association, and archivists, oral historians, and anthropologists from local universities and museums.

The use of high quality recording equipment helps to ensure that in the future you will have the greatest flexibility in using the interview material that you have produced. Professional sound quality reel-to-reel recorders are the best for archival preservation, but are the most expensive and often the least practical tool for original recordings. With the advances in technology, reel-to-reel recorders have become increasingly scarce and difficult to locate and acquire. They are also typically larger than other types of equipment and are cumbersome and awkward to use, especially when conducting interviews at remote locations.

Although neither digital or cassette recordings meet the standards of long-term archival preservation, they provide reasonably priced, readily available alternatives to reel-to-reel recordings. For many projects a good quality, moderately priced, portable cassette tape recorder will suffice. Before choosing a cassette recording, however, understand that usable recordings are unlikely to survive over the long-term. Even the highest quality cassette tapes are fragile, delicate, and definitely not mechanically stable enough to be of archival quality. If the original recording is done on cassettes, consider copying the recording onto reel-to-reel tapes for archival purposes. Be aware, however, that this process can reduce the sound quality and add to the project's cost.

The use of standard video recordings and digital video recordings in oral history interviews has become more common. When considering the use of video recording, carefully weigh the pros and cons. Video recordings can reveal facial expressions and body language not conveyed in a transcript or audio recording. They reveal both the interviewee's personality and the setting of the interview, providing color and context. However, the presence of the camera can make some interviewees uncomfortable and ultimately affect the rapport between the interviewer and interviewee.

Video recordings can expand the options for use in exhibits or film, or in the case of digital video recordings, the option of use on the Internet. If the videotape is to have future use for interpretation, though, it should be professionally recorded, sometimes making the cost prohibitive. Videotaping can be expensive, especially if a crew is needed to operate the lighting, sound, and video camera. If funding is an issue, consider selective video recording as an option. You might interview only some of the participants in your project or use an audio recording in the initial interview and later go back to videotape select portions. Again, the use of video recording will be determined to a great extent by the original project goals and available resources. Finally, videotape does not meet the same standard for long-term archival preservation as reel-to-reel tape.

As a general rule, project planners should buy or borrow the highest quality equipment they can afford. If you use a standard audiotape recorder, select one that operates with both batteries and electricity as power sources to allow flexibility during the interview. Having the option of operating on batteries is particularly important for ethnographers and archeologists who often conduct interviews on site, away from power sources. The audiotape recorder should also have a window that allows you to view the tape as it is recording and have a recording/battery light indicator so that you can easily verify that the machine is recording properly. Look for features that allow you to monitor the sound level, that warn when the tape is about to run out, and that indicate when the batteries are getting low. Most batteries will power a recorder for only four to six hours. Mini audio cassette recorders and tape recorders developed for home use cannot produce adequate sound quality and are not appropriate for oral history. The use of hand-held video equipment is not recommended. The videotapes used with this equipment do not meet permanent archival standards. Professional quality cameras and studio videotapes should be used for long term preservation and use in exhibits. Archivists prefer three-quarter inch or one-inch masters for videotapes.

Digital audiotapes and mini disc recorders also have advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side, the recorders are compact, the tapes reasonably priced, and the sound quality generally good. Digital recordings tend to have much higher audio quality than cassette audio recordings and can be duplicated without any noticeable deterioration in sound quality. The

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recordings can be edited and manipulated on a personal computer with readily available computer software. However, the life span of the digital recordings is unclear. Be aware that in the future you will probably need to migrate the data to newer technologies as those technologies evolve. In the interim, consider copying the digital recordings into other media.

Using a high quality external microphone is as important as using a high quality recorder. This avoids the problem of the tape recorder's internal microphone picking up the machine's operating noise. For best results, choose an external microphone that operates both with a direct current and batteries. Some interviewers prefer lavalier microphones, particularly for soft-spoken individuals, but both interviewer and interviewee should have microphones. Omni-directional tabletop microphones are another good option. They can be placed in the center of a desk or table and record all speakers with equal intensity.

It is also important to use name brand cassette tapes with a reputation for consistent quality. Tapes come in different time lengths: ranging from 30 minutes (C-30) to 120 minutes (C-120). C-30 means there are 15 minutes on each side. C-60 with 30 minutes on each side is the recommended length for archival purposes. C-90 and C-120 tape is thinner and more prone to break or jam. Recordings on these thin tapes can bleed through from one side to the other. Choose cassettes with screwed rather than molded or glued casings so that you have direct access to the tape inside to make repairs, untangle, or splice. Finally, be sure to take up the slack on the tape before recording. Equipment can be ordered by catalog or over the Internet from reputable manufacturers such as Marantz or through dealers. The General Service's Administration provides an easily accessible web-based system called "GSA Advantage," (www.GSAadvantage.gov), which allows federal agencies to purchase recording equipment over the Internet from a variety of vendors.

Budget

The budget for an oral history project should include salaries, research time, travel, equipment, tape transcription, indexing, cataloging, supplies, and in some instances administrative overhead or the cost of a translator. Budget estimates should also include funding for organizing, storing, and cataloging the interview materials. A high quality oral history project can be expensive, but there are ways to contain some of the costs. Equipment can be borrowed or rented if that is more cost effective than purchase. A local public radio station might rent a recording studio at a reduced rate. Unpaid volunteers can be enlisted in the project. Volunteers who are skilled typists can perform transcription if properly trained and equipped. Funding for oral history projects or specific aspects of those projects, such as tape transcription, can come from a variety of sources: park operating budgets, private grants, grants from park associations, cooperative agreements with academic institutions, and other sources. Locating funding sometimes requires creative thinking and a willingness to establish partnerships. If project funding is limited, check with a local university radio station or telecommunications department to see if a faculty member or advanced student might be available to assist with the project or if equipment can be obtained at reduced cost.

Balancing Objectives and Project Resources

After determining the amount of time, money, equipment, and expertise you are willing and able to devote to the project, it is important to balance those resources with your goals and objectives. Consider these questions: Can you be sure of producing high quality interviews, with the researchers and equipment available? If you need additional resources, where can you get them? What is the level of expertise of your interviewer or interviewers? Is it possible to have only a few people conduct the interviews to ensure greater consistency? What local resources do you have? What will it take to pull the project together and how much time?

The response to these questions will determine how much you can do and how quickly you can do it. The questions will force you to prioritize your goals and to build in quality control

from the beginning. The key question is, can you afford to do it right. If resources are limited, it is generally better to focus on a few interviews first and process them thoroughly, rather than conducting a larger number of interviews but not indexing, cataloging, transcribing, or properly preserving them. When the available resources are not balanced carefully with objectives, far too often the park ends up with little more than a box or desk drawer full of unprocessed, unusable tapes.

As you refine your project, your regional historian, chief of interpretation, curator, archeologist or ethnographer, and the audiovisual arts division at Harpers Ferry Center can be valuable sources of advice or review. The office of the chief historian or the Archeology and Ethnography program in Washington, D.C. can also provide assistance. Bringing these offices in on your proposal soon after the initial planning can prevent many potential problems.

III. PREPARING FOR AND CONDUCTING INTERVIEWS

Successful oral history interviews and oral history projects are to a great extent the result of careful preparation and skilled interviewing practices and procedures. Outlined below are some of the basic steps that are recommended in preparing for and conducting these interviews.

Background Research

Background research is a critical first step in preparing for most oral history interviews and projects. When researching an unfamiliar topic or individual, start with books, newspapers, magazine articles, and other secondary sources, but also consider investigating the local history section of the library or unpublished and published genealogies if appropriate. When researching some aspect of the history or development of a particular park, use published and unpublished books, manuscripts, studies, and reports, as well as existing park files, park records in the National Archives, or records in the National Park Service history collection at Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. Locate and identify the research that has already been done on your particular subject. Check for a published or unpublished park administrative history and for existing oral histories, perhaps in the Service's large oral history collection at Harpers Ferry Center. Checking all the existing, available sources will help you to identify any gaps in the historical record.

After conducting the initial research, outline the specific information you want, and the particular individuals you might want to interview. Learn as much as possible about each potential interviewee. Ask your prospective interviewee to suggest or provide any background material available on them (e.g. news articles, resumes, etc). Another option would be to ask prospective interviewees to complete a pre-interview questionnaire. Consider any special cultural or language factors that might affect the interview. By knowing the basics before you interview them, you will be able to concentrate on your questions and their responses—and do a better interview. The list of potential interviewees might change or expand as your research progresses. Your initial research should raise new questions. It should help you decide who must be interviewed and who should be, if time and resources permit. As mentioned earlier, interviewees can often be very helpful in referring the interviewer to other potential interviewees.

It should be noted that there are exceptions. Background research is not always possible for some interviews. Archeologists and ethnographers often do background research on the person they plan to interview but there might be no written record on the subject of their research. Indeed, the lack of a written record can be a major reason for initiating and conducting the project.

Topics and Questions

After the preliminary research is complete, it is important to structure the content of each interview in a meaningful way. The project goals will help determine how the interviews are organized.

The structure might be chronological or topical, or some combination of both. A life history interview, for example, will be well suited to a chronological approach, while an interview with a

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former park superintendent will most likely follow a topical approach. Using the background research, develop a list of either topics or questions.

One approach is to develop three kinds of questions: background questions to establish the interviewee's credentials and life story; core questions central to the research topic that are asked of every interviewee; and specific questions to be posed only to those individuals who are most likely to have that information. This approach provides a body of general information about the topic and enables you to compare individual perceptions and identify their particular biases.

All interview questions should be appropriate, comprehensive, and unbiased. Good questions are in large part the direct result of thorough background research. Greater familiarity with the subject invariably leads to a better quality and quantity of information. In addition, careful research makes it easier for the interviewer to establish a rapport with the interviewee and conduct the interview. A well-prepared interviewer will more likely be a confident interviewer. Although a prepared list of questions or topics should serve as the interviewer's guide during the interviews, the interviewer's general knowledge of the subject will give him the flexibility to move beyond that list as the interviewee provides further detail.

Preparing a list of specific questions (as opposed to general topics) has both advantages and drawbacks. This step forces interviewers to organize their thoughts as they prepare for their interviews and provides a guidepost to follow during the interviews. Having a list of key questions helps the interviewer avoid unintentionally introducing bias by asking each interviewee different questions. This is especially important if several people are doing the interviews or if long intervals of time pass between interviews. Also, using some standardized key questions can make it easier for future researchers to compare the perspectives of different interviewees on a particular topic.

Some oral history experts, however, maintain that drafting a set of topics to cover during an interview is preferable to writing out specific questions. They argue that writing specific, detailed questions may constrain the range and flow of the interview. By contrast, they contend, a general list of topics allows for the fluctuation and the spontaneity so important to the interview process and will result in richer, more detailed discussions. The debate over using general topics versus specific questions will continue. Ultimately, each interviewer must select the approach that he or she finds most comfortable and effective and the one best suited to the goals and purpose of the particular interview or project. The goal is to acquire information, and interview questions can be covered in a variety of ways. The interviewer should be familiar enough with the list of questions or topics to facilitate a smooth conversation that will ultimately provide the needed information. Whether using lists of specific questions or general topics, the interviewer should remain open to new questions or avenues for research that might emerge during the interview. Ethnographers often begin with more general or abstract questions and then follow up with more specific questions based on the interviewee's initial response. They might use the follow up questions to elicit additional information, to determine the particular sequence of events, or to confirm and clarify what the interviewee has said.

Scheduling Interviews

Outlining the planned topics and questions to be addressed will help the interviewer determine whether additional research is required before conducting the interview. If the interview is a topical one, what additional background information do you want or need on this particular subject? If it is a biographical interview, do you want to concentrate on certain aspects of the interviewee's life? Defining the topics and questions will also help the interviewer determine if there is a need to schedule more than one session. If time with the interviewee will be limited, the interviewer must decide which questions or topics are most important so that these can be addressed first. If there are plans to use the interview as part of a wayside exhibit or a film, the interviewer might want to ask certain questions whose answers might provide particularly good content for such interpretive uses.

Develop a list of individuals to be interviewed in priority order. Oral history experts generally recommend that a project start with the oldest and most significant interviewees first and leave the younger, more peripheral ones for later. In addition to age, consider other factors such as mental ability, location, and availability. In prioritizing interview candidates, also consider the

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following: Who would have the best overall perspective? Who could supply specific details? Although some oral history experts recommend interviewing the most significant individuals first, other experts recommend conducting preliminary interviews before interviewing these key individuals in order to gather important background. Key interviewees can sometimes help identify other good sources. Also note that multiple interviewees can be used to corroborate information, identify inaccuracies, and acquire a greater level of detail.

Occasionally individuals may resist being interviewed because they are unfamiliar with the process and do not understand what is expected of them. To help alleviate these concerns, write or call each prospective interviewee to explain the project's objectives and your affiliation and then request the interview. A common approach is to send a letter (or e-mail) that introduces the interviewer, identifies the interviewer's agency, and indicates the purpose of the interview and the general topics to be covered. Such a letter or memo might also briefly describe the project to include the project goals and expectations. It is important to convey why that individual's particular story or perspective is important to the project.

If the initial contact is by letter (or e-mail), follow up with a phone call to answer any questions about the project, to determine their participation, and to schedule the actual interview. An introductory letter, though, might be ineffective with some individuals. A short introductory phone call, perhaps with the name of a mutual acquaintance, could be more effective. Follow up immediately with correspondence confirming the request for an interview, the general subject, and the agreed date. If the interview is going to be tape-recorded, be sure to note this. The interviewer can also send an advance letter laying out in general terms the subjects to be covered to refresh interviewee's memory, which might make the interviewee more comfortable, but avoid sending a list of specific questions in advance. The interviewee might then provide rehearsed answers that destroy spontaneity of the interview. The advance letter could also ask the interviewee to share any relevant documents or photographs at the time of the interview. Even with these efforts, some interviewees might still be reluctant to share their traditional knowledge in an interview.

Conducting oral history interviews can be both exhilarating and exhausting. The interviewer should try not to schedule too many interviews in a single day. If at all possible, limit yourself to three a day. Leave time to go back over the interview while it is fresh in your mind to make notes to yourself about your impressions, the interviewee's demeanor, new questions raised, new sources, and anything else which will help you remember that particular interview. The length of a good interview may vary. There is no set limit. It is not unusual for a career interview with a senior official to result in eight or ten hours of tape. Individual interview sessions, however, are typically an hour and a half to two hours. Rarely should they go beyond three hours. If more time is needed, schedule another session. Consider the age and health of interviewee. An older interviewee might tire more easily, and the interviewer should be alert for signs of fatigue. If there are frequent interruptions during the interview, consider rescheduling it for another time.

Finally, when scheduling interviews, generally it is a good idea to avoid joint interviews. The more parties involved in the interview, the more difficult it becomes for interviewer to retain control over the interview process and to establish the rapport with the interviewee that is so important. Also, during the course of a joint interview, one interviewee can influence the other and dominate the interview, or the interviewees might compete with each other for interview time. On occasion, a joint interview might be unavoidable. In such instances, clearly identify each speaker on the tape to avoid confusion later.

Setting up the Interview

Select a location for the interview that is quiet, comfortable for the interviewee, and as free from distractions and interruptions as possible. The best location may be a conference room or a private office, perhaps the interviewee's office. Some interviewees might be most comfortable in their homes. Large rooms are typically better for recording purposes than small. Rooms with carpets, books and other soft materials are far better than austere, reverberant rooms. Place the interviewee out into the room rather than against a wall or in a corner because these hard surfaces

voice, but also muffles any sound of chair movements or foot tapping.

Background conversations and noises are distracting and can mar the sound quality of the final tape. The recorder will invariably pick up noises that the interview participants have learned to filter out such as traffic, air conditioners and fans. Try to minimize these intrusions as much as possible. Poor recordings take longer to transcribe and are thus more expensive to process. Also the risk of transcription errors is greater with poor recordings.

High quality recordings can save a large project thousands of dollars. The tape recorder should be at least a few feet from the microphone to encourage the interviewee to speak clearly and project his voice. Individuals are sometimes more relaxed when they have something in their hands while they talk, and sometimes a photograph, document, or artifact in the hands of the interviewee can be a useful tool. However, to maintain sound quality it is generally a good idea to place the microphone and cable out of the interviewee's easy reach.

Relax and put the interviewee at ease. Position the recorder so that the microphone can register the voices of each participant, but in such a way that the interviewer will be able to see and monitor the equipment. The interviewer should already be very familiar with and have practiced working with the recording equipment. Monitoring the equipment during the interview so that there is a consistent sound level is very important. If at all possible, someone should accompany the interviewer to operate the equipment, so that he or she may focus on the actual interview rather than the technical aspects of recording. Often the project plan and budget do not provide for a second person to operate the recording equipment. In such instances, the interviewer will have to assume these duties; however, the interviewer cannot give the time and attention to maintaining proper levels and listening for noise which a machine operator could. If the interviewer alone is operating the equipment, then it is particularly important to use a tape machine that has a very good quality, undetectable, automatic level control circuit. The automatic gain or automatic level control circuits found in the least expensive machines are not satisfactory and should be avoided. Only the very best automatic recording level controls can work without an annoying fluctuation in background noise between words. Come equipped with batteries, electrical adapters, extension cords, and any other simple objects that might ultimately be critical to a successful recording.

Occasionally, the interviewer might want to explain the equipment to the interviewee before beginning. As a rule, though, the less attention brought to the equipment the better so as not to make the interviewee uncomfortable. The interviewer should quickly check the indicator lights, and make a brief test recording to see if the microphone is registering the voices and then adjust the sound level appropriately. After making sure that the equipment is working properly, the interview can begin. Each interview should begin with an appropriate, formal introduction fully identifying the interviewee, the interviewer, and the date and place of the interview in case the labeling information becomes separated from the tape or lost.

Some of the above guidance related to the interview setting will not apply for archeologists and ethnographers who often conduct interviews while on site visits, in vehicles or outside walking around, or while the interviewee is handling artifacts. Professionals in these disciplines sometimes need to weigh the relative advantages of conducting interviews on site where the interviewees can perhaps recall things more easily versus conducting the interviews away from their immediate surroundings where they might feel greater freedom to express themselves. However, the recommendations about becoming familiar with the equipment, conducting a recording level test, and monitoring the recording indicators remain valid no matter where the interview occurs.

Asking Questions

Good questioning techniques tend to generate information that is as unbiased, accurate, and as complete as possible. Consider the first question carefully for it can help set the tone for the entire interview. The first question should be neutral, clear, and designed to put the interviewee at ease. A simple question about the interviewee's background or position is often a good way to start.

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As noted earlier, the interviewer should have a very clear idea of the topics to be covered with this particular individual. Having already prepared a list of topics or questions helps the interviewer ask questions in a logical sequence without worrying about occasionally skipping around. It also helps ensure that all the most important questions of that particular individual are addressed. Interviewers who have done sufficient background research before their interviews will already have some of this basic information. As the interviewers complete additional interviews on a particular subject, their knowledge of the subject matter will grow, and they will be able to determine if the information being gathered is consistent from one interview to the next (and if not, why not).

Listening carefully to what the interviewee says is just as important as asking the questions. Follow-up questions should "flow" from the initial one and follow in a logical sequence. This order will often change as the interview progresses. Occasionally, an interviewer will realize that a question he or she planned to ask is inappropriate, has already been answered, or is even impossible to answer, and will simply drop that particular question. Particularly with a list of prepared questions, there is the risk that the interviewer will move on to the next question on the list rather than asking a question that follows up on what the interviewee has just said. As a result, important information can be lost. The interviewer should as much as possible strive to keep to the overall objectives and adhere to the general outline of topics or questions. If the interviewee begins discussing information that is not relevant, tactfully steer him back to the subject. Interviewers sometimes use maps, photographs, and artifacts to help the interviewee recall information.

The interviewer should avoid interrupting the interviewee. The silence created when the interviewee pauses can be valuable. Although a long pause can sometimes feel awkward, it may signify that the interviewee is thinking of additional information. Give the interviewee plenty of time to answer the questions, and resist the temptation to jump in and help. If the interviewee continues to hesitate, the interviewer can try rephrasing the question but should never try to answer the question. One of the marks of experienced interviewers is how little they are heard on the tape. This often means not adding other details to the interviewee's account no matter how familiar the interviewee with the subject. As a rule, interviews should remain neutral and avoid offering their own opinions on the subject of the interview. As Barbara Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan observe in their short *Guide to Oral History Interviews*, "The goal in an oral history is to collect long paragraphs of answers from well focused, clearly stated, open-ended, neutral questions."^[4] The interviewer is responsible for guiding the interview and should be able to judge when a particular topic is exhausted and it is time to go on to the next question. The ability to skillfully guide an interview can be refined with experience.

Again, it is important to ask follow-up questions to elicit further details or to clarify a particular point. If other questions come to the interviewer while listening to the interviewee, most often it is best to jot them down and ask them later rather than interrupting the flow of the interview. It is also helpful to develop a list of the proper names that come up during the interview. At the end of the interview ask the interviewee to review the list to check the spelling. This list will be useful to the transcriber later on.

Review all questions to ensure that they are neutral and appropriate. Most often, it is best to start with the most general open-ended questions possible and follow up with more specific questions based on the interviewee's responses. Construct the appropriate mix of open-ended questions that encourage the interviewee to talk freely and closed questions to get specific pieces of information. Open-ended questions often begin with the following expressions: "Describe...", "Explain...", and "Tell me about..." Closed questions usually elicit a one word or phrase response, such as a simple "yes" or "no." They provide specific details, but generally do not promote spontaneous discussion. Avoid questions that are complex and have many parts. These can be difficult for the interviewee to follow and respond to. Encourage the interviewee to be as specific as possible. When appropriate, ask for concrete illustrations and examples. This will add color and depth to the material collected in the interview.

Being a good listener is the hallmark of a good interviewer. Being a good listener enables the interviewer to ask important follow-up questions and to seek clarification when necessary. The interviewer should avoid leading questions. The most obvious examples are questions that begin with "Don't you think that...?" or "Would you agree that ...?" The interviewer should also

avoid using jargon or acronyms. If the interviewee uses jargon or acronyms, ask for explanations or translations. At the end of the interview, give the interviewee the opportunity to add information that has not already been covered or to discuss something he or she was waiting to be asked.

After the session ends, let the interviewee know how the interviewer can be contacted and if possible tell him how he] will be receiving a copy of the tape or transcript. It is often a good idea to continue chatting with the interviewee briefly after the interview to maintain the rapport and reaffirm that their time has been valuable. Interviewees who have had a positive interview experience are understandably more likely to help convince others to participate in the project. Finally if both parties have not signed a legal release or deed of gift form before beginning the interview, make sure this is done before leaving the session. Legal release and deed of gift issues will be discussed further in Chapter VI.

After the Interview

Immediately after the interview, label all tapes with the names of the interviewer and interviewee, date, and place. If there is more than one tape, number each one on the label and number each tape in relation to the others. For example, if the interview was lengthy and resulted in five tapes, number each as 1 of 5, 2 of 5, etc. If using cassette tapes, pop the two small plastic tabs on each tape so that no one can record over it by accident. The tape box label should be filled in with the following information: the names of the interviewee and interviewer, the interview date and location, and the cassette tape or reel number. The tape speed, make and model of the tape recorder can also be noted if desired. Make a properly labeled duplicate as soon as possible to use as a working copy, and store the original separately in a safe place, preferably at a different location.

Be sure to fill out an “interview log sheet” for each interview as soon as possible. The log sheet provides information on the interviewee, a history of the interview including why it was done, the date and location of the interview, and a rough index to the contents of the tape. If the tape is to be transcribed, the log sheet will provide the transcriber with such basic information as names of people and places, etc. If the tape is not transcribed, the log sheet may be the major reference tool for the interview. A sample “interview log sheet” can be found at Appendix A.

Finally, send a thank you note to the interviewee. A note is a small but important way of acknowledging that the interviewee has given his or her time, shared their expertise and often made an emotional investment. If for some reason the release was not signed at the time of the interview, this is a good time to mail the form to interviewee with a request for his or her signature. Including a stamped pre-addressed envelope will help encourage return of the form.

IV. HANDLING ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

Oral history recordings are perishable resources that will quickly disappear if not handled correctly. Taking the appropriate measures to preserve interview recordings and transcripts is a critical step in any oral history project. Reel-to-reel tapes typically have a life span of 30 years or less. Cassette tape recordings and videotapes are even less stable, with a much shorter shelf life. Digital recordings may prove to be the most perishable medium of all. Digital recordings can become unusable in any one of three ways: as the tapes or disks physically deteriorate; as the hardware on which they are played becomes obsolete and unavailable; and as the proprietary software on which they are based passes out of use. Even transcripts and other textual documentation can be lost or damaged if they are filed incorrectly, organized poorly, have inadequate environmental controls, or are mishandled in other ways. Duplicating the original recording to a variety of media forms increases the likelihood that the material will survive many years. If the original recording is on a mini disc, a use copy on a standard audiotape, a preservation copy on a reel-to-reel tape, a verbatim transcript, and an edited transcript, the material will most likely be around for a very long time.

To preserve oral history collections and make them available to future generations, it is essential to observe established archival standards of organization, storage, and description. Some of the

procedures may initially seem complicated, but they are actually fairly simple and logical. More important, they are proven methods for managing archival collections effectively. Adopting these methods and procedures can prevent a great deal of hard work from going to waste and priceless information from being lost forever.

Arrangement

Think in terms of *collections* –not individual interviews. Do not handle individual interviews as separate objects, but rather treat them as parts of larger sets or collections of interviews. Each collection should represent the work of a single oral history project. Collections produced by different projects should never be merged or inter-filed.

The materials in each archival collection should be arranged hierarchically. Collections are usually broken down into smaller groups, called “series.” Series may be broken down further into “subseries” and then into file units. File units consist of individual items or documents. The hierarchical arrangement provides intellectual control over archival collections, makes it easier to manage collections, and ultimately can help preserve the materials. Most important, hierarchical arrangement makes it possible to do archival reference. Researchers cannot efficiently and effectively access collections unless they are arranged hierarchically.

Specific arrangement patterns may vary according to the unique characteristics of individual collections, but the following format could be used in most cases.

First, divide each collection into series, based on the physical type of material (magnetic sound recording tapes, videotapes, paper files, compact disks, etc.), or based on the content or the nature of the documents. Here is how a series breakdown (or “hierarchy”) of a single oral history collection might look:

- SERIES I: Sound Recordings (cassette tapes, mini discs, reel-to-reel magnetic tape master recordings of interviews)
- SERIES II: Videotape Recordings
- SERIES III: Transcripts (paper transcripts of interviews)
- SERIES IV: Project Files (supporting documentation compiled for each interview or for the project as a whole, such as signed release forms, correspondence with interviewees, lists of questions, biographical data sheets on interviewees, and background notes).

It is not necessary to adhere strictly to the example given above. Most collections, for example, probably would not include videotape recordings. Some may have Digital Analog Tapes (DAT) instead of or in addition to magnetic tapes. Some may include photographs. And some parks might prefer to combine the textual materials (i.e., transcripts and project files) into a single series.

In addition, if an oral history project is carried out in phases or by teams that focused on different topics, it might be appropriate to base the series organization on the phase or topic – especially if attempting to inter-file the materials would create problems. For example, if an oral history project on Native Americans were conducted with members of various tribes, the park may chose to organize the collection into series by tribe. If a project on a park’s history began with a series of chronologically-arranged interviews about its early years but later shifted to a series of topically-arranged interviews about the recent years, the difference in both subject matter and arrangement scheme could warrant handling each of those phases as separate series. If a collection is divided into series according to phase or topic, however, consider breaking each of those series down into sub series based on physical type of material, as shown above. Finally, it may be unnecessary to organize unusually small collections into series. Collections of only three or four interviews may be arranged at the file unit level.

Second, once the collection has been arranged into series (and subseries, if necessary), arrange the individual tapes or files in each series or subseries. File or tape arrangement within series or subseries is at the discretion of the park, and arrangement may vary from collection to collection. Materials in each series may be arranged alphabetically by name of interviewee, chronologically by date of interview, or numerically (with numbers representing the order in which the interviews were conducted or some other numerical code that that park wishes to adopt). Within each collection, however, it may be useful to follow the same arrangement scheme for each series. For example, if the tapes are arranged according to a certain numerical code, arrange the transcripts

in the same way.

Physical Processing and Storage

As noted, reel-to-reel analog tapes are the preferred archival medium for oral history recordings. Archival sound recordings of oral history interviews should be kept on mastering grade, tensilized, 1.5 mil polyester analog reel-to-reel tapes, if at all possible. When properly stored, such tapes can last for up to 30 years. Digital recordings and cassette tapes are not reliable for long-term preservation.

Store reel-to-reel tapes “tails out.” This means that after recording, the tape is not rewound but stored as is. Rapid rewinding can create uneven tension, which can cause damage over time. Do not rewind tapes until immediately before playing them. If a tape is wound unevenly, with edges sticking out, then rewind it at playback speed until each layer is properly aligned.

Tapes should be played approximately every three years to prevent “bleed-through” or “print-through” of voices from one layer of the tape to other layers, which can cause echoing. Inspect sample tapes periodically and copy them onto new tapes if there are signs of deterioration. Parks should be especially careful about inspecting tapes that are more than ten years old and be prepared to reformat entire collections to ensure long-term preservation. Store each reel in an archival quality, acid-free tape box. Larger reels (10 inches in diameter) should be stored in boxes with supports for the hubs. Each box should be labeled in pencil and shelved vertically.

Tapes will last longer if kept under relatively constant temperature and humidity. Archival standards call for 65 degrees maximum temperature, and a set point of 35 percent relative humidity, plus-or-minus 5 percent.

- Do not expose tapes to ultraviolet radiation or to strong magnetic fields (which can be given off by electric motors, magnets, loudspeakers, and similar types of equipment).
- Install air conditioning filters and replace them regularly to help maintain a dust-free environment; clean tape heads on recording equipment to prevent tapes from being damaged; wear no-lint white cotton gloves when handling tapes; and avoid touching the playing surface of tapes.
- Return tapes to their containers immediately after use.
- Prohibit eating, drinking, or smoking in areas where tapes are housed.

The master or archival copy of the tape should be managed as part of the park’s museum collection, and should NEVER be used for research. As soon as possible after the interview, make one or more copies of the tape and use these as reference copies. Only reference copies – not the master – should be used for making transcripts or made available to researchers. Reference copies need not be managed as part of the museum collection or kept on reel-to-reel tape. For more information about tape preservation, storage, duplication, and handling, see “Preservation of Magnetic Media,” National Park Service *Conserve O Gram*, July 1993, No. 19/8, and “Care of Archival Digital and Magnetic Media,” National Park Service *Conserve O Gram*, September 1996, No. 19/20. These technical leaflets are available on the Museum Management Program web site at www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/index.htm.

Supporting materials such as photographs, maps, correspondence, and copies of the legal releases should not be stored in the same boxes with magnetic tapes. They should be placed in acid-free folders, arranged by file unit, and stored in acid-free boxes. For preservation purposes and for ease of retrieval, paper materials should be filed separately from tapes (as outlined in the section on “Arrangement,” above). It is unnecessary to put each individual document into its own folder; rather, all documents for a given file unit should be placed into the same folder. File units containing a large number of documents may be broken up into multiple folders, but all of the folders would still be considered one file unit.

Remove all staples, paper clips, rubber bands, and other fasteners from documents before putting them into folders. Place damaged, fragile, or acidic documents into polyester sleeves.

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“Preservation copying” of damaged, fragile, or acidic documents onto acid-free paper is permissible, provided the document has no intrinsic value, after which the originals may be discarded. (NOTE: it is not necessary to follow de-accessioning procedures when discarding originals after preservation copies have been made). Label all folders with pencil, but do not label individual documents. Place all folders into acid-free, archival quality document boxes.

Environmental conditions for paper materials are not quite as strict as for magnetic tapes. Maintain relatively constant conditions of no more than 70 degrees, with a relative humidity between 30 and 50 percent. Do not store paper records in wooden filing cabinets or in metal filing cabinets that are susceptible to rust. Do not place archival material in rooms with carpets or with particle board, masonite, or plywood furniture subject to off-gassing, or use strong cleaning agents (such as ammonia or bleach) that could give off damaging fumes. Do not expose paper records to excessive light levels, and do not place boxes of documents on the floor or within 18 inches of light fixtures, pipes, or sprinkler heads.

For more information about handling paper documents, see “Storing Archival Paper-Based Materials,” National Park Service *Conserve O Gram*, September 1996, No. 19/15.

Cataloging in the Automated National Catalog System (ANCS+) .

Original oral history collections that are managed as part of the park’s museum collection should be cataloged in the Service’s Automated National Catalog System (ANCS+). Catalog at the collection level when making entries into the ANCS+ Collection Management Module. Individual oral history interviews should not be cataloged in the Collections Management Module but may be listed in the Supplement Module or described in detail in the Archives Module (see below).

When cataloging in the Collection Management Module, only enter descriptions of entire oral history collections. Each collection should be assigned a single catalog number, no matter how many interviews it contains. Then enter general information about the collection as a whole – such as the total volume of the collection, a general description of the topics covered in the interviews, a listing of the collection’s individual series, and a brief explanation of when and how the oral history project was conducted. Remember that the description in the Collection Management Module should only provide a brief overview of the entire collection.

Parks have the option of using the Collection Management Module to list individual interviews by pressing the “Supplemental Module” button and selecting “Container List.” This will be a box-by-box listing of folder titles or names of interviewees, however, not a full catalog entry. For further information on how to enter collection-level archival entries in the Collection Management Module, see the Field Help Notes in the ANCS+ program, or the ANCS+ User Manual.

Use the ANCS+ Archives Module for detailed information about series, subseries, and individual interviews. After entering the collection level data in the Collections Management Module, press the “Send to Archives” button to copy the entry over to the Archives Module. Then, in the Archives Module, enter descriptions of individual series and subseries, as necessary, and descriptions of individual file units or items, if desired. By entering this information into the Archives Module, everything will be linked, hierarchically, to the collection-level entry in the Collections Management Module. This will ensure intellectual control over the collection and enhance accessibility.

Generally, the best strategy is to provide general overviews of each of the series (i.e., sound recordings, transcripts, project files). Then, if the tapes or files are arranged the same way in each of the series – for example, alphabetically by name of interviewee – select one series to include file-by-file descriptions providing detailed information about each interview. For more information on how to enter series-level, sub series-level, and file-level descriptions in the ANCS+ Archives Module, see the Field Help Notes in the ANCS+ program, or the ANCS+ User Manual.

Simply revise existing catalog entries as additional interviews are completed for on-going projects. If new interviews are conducted for on-going oral history projects that are already cataloged

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volume and the addition of any new topics. In most cases, however, it is preferable to wait until a project has been completed before cataloging it.

Finally, it is important to consult a park, regional, or National Park Service records officer to determine the status of all tapes, transcripts, and other materials related to oral history interviews and projects that are conducted by park staff or by volunteers and contractors as official park assignments. If an oral history interview or project was conducted as an official activity of the National Park Service involving the expenditure of Federal funds – whether it was undertaken by Service employees or by contractors – the tapes and all related materials become Federal records, as defined by the Federal Records Act, as amended (44 USC 2901 et seq.). The recordings, transcripts, and associated documentation must be managed in accordance with *Director's Order 19: Records Management*. However, if the interview recording or interview collection was produced outside the Federal government and acquired by or donated to the National Park Service, the materials are not Federal records. These recordings and supporting documentation should be incorporated into and managed as part of the National Park Service's museum system. Oral history materials are not currently listed on the Service's Records Disposition schedule, and the National Archives and Records Administration has not yet made a formal determination as to their disposition status. The National Park Service's Museum Management Program will be developing further guidance. In the interim, the best approach is to treat the original recordings and related materials as permanent records.

V. PROCESSING AND USING ORAL HISTORY

The true value of recorded oral history is determined by how well it is preserved, processed, and made accessible to researchers. The information contained in the interviews becomes valuable only through use. If an interview tape is stored in a desk drawer and forgotten, eventually the information will be lost. Parks should make every effort to process the interviews as thoroughly and quickly as possible and then to place them in a park or other archives where they can be made available to researchers. Processing includes the following stages: cataloging (discussed in the previous chapter), indexing, transcription, and editing. Each tape should be logged in on a "Log of Activity" form that tracks all the operations to be performed on it from the recording to the final typing and distribution of the transcript. A sample "Log of Activity" form can be found in Appendix A.

Tape Transcription

Transcription is the process of converting the oral interview into a typescript. It is the transfer of information from an audio recording into a verbatim written or typewritten copy. A transcript is a reflection of the spoken word, not the written word. The recording remains the primary source material. Tape transcription can be a tedious, time-consuming, and expensive process. It can take as much as five to eight hours to transcribe each hour of audiotape. However, the transcription process is very important for several reasons. The sound quality of tape recordings can deteriorate over time and transcription ensures that a written record of the interviews will be preserved over the long term. Also transcription allows both the interviewer and interviewee the opportunity to review the transcript and make corrections, a process that ultimately improves the quality and accuracy of the interview. Researchers find transcripts much easier to use than audiotapes. Researchers will be reluctant to listen to hours of tapes without some indication of what they contain. Finally, a well-packaged and professionally produced transcription is a highly visible product of the program useful for justifying further expenditures.

When transcription is not possible, it is a good idea at a minimum to produce an abstract or index. A simple way to index tape is to replay it and make notes on the content. A tape index can be done by using a stopwatch to record the time elapsed on each side of the tape as a new subject is introduced. The notes and index can become a useful finding aid for the collection.

If you decide to produce transcripts, look for someone who has had experience transcribing tapes, not just a skilled typist, to do the work. Historians with the Washington office, regional offices, local universities, and historical societies can help in locating experienced oral history transcribers. If someone without experience such as a volunteer will be transcribing the tapes, some basic training will be necessary. Ask the transcriber to provide each transcript in electronic form (on a computer disk or as an e-mail attachment) to make the editing process easier. It is also a good idea to provide the transcriber with a word list containing the proper names and places noted during the interview to help avoid errors and gaps. This simple task can save considerable time and effort later on in the editing process.

There is some debate concerning what to include and what to leave out in the transcription process and what form the transcripts should take. It is important to address some of these issues early on and standardize your approach. The Oral History Association can provide the most current and commonly accepted guidance and information about transcription, including the new computer voice recognition systems. Other good, reliable sources concerning transcription are *Transcribing and Editing Oral History* (1977) by Willa K. Baum and *The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual for Field Workers in Folklore and Oral History* (1995) by Edward D. Ives.

Although specific approaches to transcription can differ, there are some widely accepted general guidelines for transcribing tapes.

- Do a cover page with the basic information about the interview, to include the names of interviewer and interviewee, name of project, and date of interview.
- Do not clean up wording or grammar.
- Do not include false starts unless they add meaning. However, if the transcript will be used for tape editing to produce an audiovisual presentation, include everything.
- Omit the interviewer's supportive sounds such as "I see," "Uh huh," and crutch words such as "you know", unless they add meaning or convey the flavor of the speech patterns. (Again, if the purpose is tape editing, retain these.)
- Double space the typescript and provide adequate margins to leave room for editing.
- Identify each speaker either by using their full last names, abbreviations, or by a clearly identified "Q" and "A".
- Note the status of the tape. For example, indicate "interruption in tape," "end of side one," or "end of interview."
- Begin each page of the typescript by identifying the speaker either by name (or by a "Q" or "A"), even if it is a continuation of the previous page.
- Include both the interviewer's questions and the interviewee's answers.
- Leave a blank space for an word or phrase that is unclear. The interviewer or interviewee may fill this in later.
- If the spelling of a proper name is unclear, spell the name phonetically and indicate in parenthesis "phonetic".
- Laughter and significant gestures may be indicated in brackets. (But do this sparingly.)

If someone other than the interviewer will be transcribing the tape, even when using a professional transcriber, consider providing some general written guidelines concerning methodology (e.g. how to handle false starts, spellings, pauses). If using an untrained volunteer, you will need to provide even more detailed and precise guidance. For transcription that involves another language, see Appendix E.

Editing the Transcript

The goal of transcription is to produce as accurate a representation of the interview as possible while omitting obviously extraneous sounds, such as street noise or a ringing telephone. However,

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editing is an important step in making sense of the spoken word. People do not always speak in complete sentences with their thoughts clearly organized and stated. Words can sometimes sound alike resulting in errors or distorted meaning. Therefore, the interviewer should always conduct what is sometimes called an “audio edit,” checking the transcript against the audio recording. This allows the interviewer to correct any errors that the transcriber might have made, fill in gaps, and make sure nothing was omitted. As Historian Donald Ritchie observed, the tape is what was said, while the edited transcript represents the intended meaning of what was said.^[5] Provide the edited copy for research use, but also retain a copy of the unedited verbatim transcript in the file for reference.

Here are some basic guidelines for editing an interview tape transcript.

- Edit for style and clarity rather than content
- Fill in any blanks left by the transcriber.
- Never edit so extensively as to modify the facts or the general impression of the interview, except to remove restricted material.
- Remove any false starts that remain in the transcript.
- Correct spelling and punctuation errors.
- Correct grammar only when the corrections help clarify ambiguities or misstatements.
- Remove any restricted sections. Note on the transcript that the material was removed.

More in-depth editing, for publication purposes for example, might involve deleting entire words or sections of the tape in order to make the transcript read more easily. Sometimes words are added in brackets to clarify meaning or provide additional information. Explanatory footnotes with additional information may be added when appropriate.

Finalizing the Interview

Interviewees should have the opportunity to review the edited transcripts before the transcripts are distributed or published to make sure that they agree with the changes and to address any points that still need clarification. This step can significantly improve the accuracy and detail of the interview. Send the transcript with a cover letter stating that if it is not returned by the prescribed time, the editor will assume approval and complete the processing. After the editing and review are complete, the transcript should be put in final form. Again, use of a computer disk and word processor makes this process easier. The final version of the transcript should include a title page, an interview log sheet, a table of contents, a statement of any restrictions or rules for researchers if applicable, photographs or any other illustrative matter, and if possible, an index of names and events mentioned in the interview. As a courtesy and a good public relations measure, provide the interviewee with a final copy of the transcript.

Using the Products of Oral History

Parks have a responsibility to make the product available to researchers. They do this by publicizing the collection, making it available to researchers, and providing users with finding aids and reference guides to the collection. An oral history collection can be shared with researchers and the general public in several ways, for example through exhibits, articles, books, web sites, and audio centers. Oral history tapes and transcripts can support a wide range of different products.

In addition to listing interviews in ANCS+ as discussed in the previous chapters, parks can report collections of ten or more interviews to the Library of Congress for inclusion in the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections*. A park might consider submitting press releases or articles to newspapers and magazines that describe its oral history program, the program's

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objectives and activities, as well as any particularly interesting aspects of the program. Park staff might write a column about their oral history program or project for their park newsletter or a local newspaper. A large, well-managed oral history program could result in a book, which might be published by the park or its cooperating association. The Internet is an excellent vehicle for publicizing oral history collections and making tape recordings and full-text versions of tape transcripts available to a broad audience.

Users of oral history, whether park staff or outside researchers, should be provided with some assistance in the form of reference guides to the contents of the tapes, transcripts and collection as a whole. There are two levels at which guides should be provided: the level of the individual interview and the level of the collection as a whole. There are also progressively more detailed steps in gaining intellectual control over the information contained in interviews. Park staff should strive to accomplish as many of those steps as they can.

Step 1: If no transcript is produced, the completed interview log sheet must serve as the basic guide for that interview -- the absolute minimum requirement for processing an interview.

Step 2: If a transcript has been produced, it should have a table of contents that directs the user to the proper page.

Step 3: An index to the transcript traces significant comments on people, places, events, structures, etc. There are various guides, such as *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th ed. (Chicago:

The University of Chicago Press, 2003), and computer software packages available to help develop an index.

The park needs to make sure that each researcher using the interview material understands his or her responsibilities. Accommodating researchers involves a certain amount of staff time and scheduling, so it is appropriate to restrict use of the collection to serious research. Researchers should be required to complete and sign a form agreeing to comply with all the specified rules and regulations. (See Appendix D) The park should be able to provide a set schedule when a researcher may use the collection or allow access by appointment.

Oral History as Research Material

After the interview is made available to researchers, they too have certain responsibilities, specifically in how they use that material. A researcher should treat oral history with the same level of skepticism as any other source material. While documents can be incomplete, inaccurate, and deceiving, so can oral history. Oral history is as reliable or unreliable as any other research material and generally should not stand alone as the researcher's only source. As with textual materials, it should constantly be tested against other evidence. Oral evidence should meet the same standard of being credible and verifiable as written evidence. Some interviewee comments can be self-serving or inaccurate, and some interviewers can be too timid or polite to ask probing questions. Memories can be faulty and sometimes interviewees confuse dates, telescope time, rearrange their memories; they forget names, places and similar details. Memories dim, and interviewees tend to remember what they believe is important, not necessarily what the interviewer believes is important. Each interviewee offers a unique perspective and speaks from his or her own point of view.

When conducting an oral history project, it is helpful to collect as many perspectives as possible and to weigh personal accounts against each other. The collected stories from a group can reinforce each other and reveal common threads. In evaluating the credibility of the interviewees, consider the following questions: Were they in a position to experience events firsthand or simply passing on second hand information? What biases might have shaped their perceptions? What subsequent events might have caused them to rethink or reinterpret their past? How closely does their account agree with other documentary evidence from the period, and how do they explain any discrepancies? Where does an interviewee's account correspond to other interviewees, and where do they differ?

Again, the interview is not truly complete until it has been processed and made available to researchers. Both collection managers and researchers must be fully aware of their responsibilities in handling this material and using it as source material.

VI. ETHICS AND LEGALITIES

Two critical aspects of every oral history interview or project go well beyond the content or methodology. These are the fundamental ethical and legal considerations surrounding the interview process and product or products.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting and using oral history there are two principal ethical concerns. One is a concern for the interview process - the methodology. The second is a concern for the person – the rights, privacy and dignity of the interviewee. The interviewer must always weigh the concern for professional research methodology against concern for the person being interviewed. The ethical concern for the person being interviewed should always out-weigh concern for the interview process. The Oral History Association provides excellent guidelines on ethical behavior. For more information, see its *Evaluation Guidelines* and its *Principles and Standards of the Oral History Association*, Pamphlet Number 3, (Rev. ed. September 2000).

The most important ethical consideration is the interviewer's obligation to be open and honest with the interviewee at all times. Before the interview, the interviewer must carefully explain to the interviewee the purpose of the interview, his rights in the interviewing process, the eventual disposition of the tape and the transcript, the immediate planned use of the interview, and the wide range of potential future uses. The interviewer should explain that the interviewee will be asked to sign a legal release and that the interview will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law until this is done. They should **never** make any commitments that they might not be able to honor, such as promising publication or exemption from requests submitted under the Freedom of Information Act.

Respect each individual's right to privacy. This is not only an ethical consideration but a legal one as well, as discussed later in this chapter. When requesting an interview, the interviewer is asking the interviewee to share his or her personal reflections and perspectives and to sacrifice some degree of privacy. It is important to recognize that participation in an interview and the resulting product can sometimes make the interviewee vulnerable, particularly if the interview addresses sensitive or controversial subjects. The individual must weigh the risks of participating in the interview against the potential benefits. Without candid, reliable information about the purpose and the planned and potential uses of the interview, the interviewee simply cannot evaluate those risks effectively. Because of these privacy concerns, in some instances, the interviewers might need to bring certain risks to the attention of the interviewees if they do not perceive them for themselves.

If the interviewee perceives personal risk, the interviewer should to the extent possible adjust the interview process to alleviate his concerns. This may require adding a restriction clause in the release form or an agreement either to delete certain sections or avoid certain topics or questions. However, be sure that the interviewee understands that any restrictions are unlikely to withstand a Freedom of Information Act request. Because even minor restrictions limit and complicate future use of the material by Park Service staff or outside researchers, interviewers should avoid restriction clauses whenever possible. When dealing with a particularly difficult or traumatic event or issue, raise challenging questions, give the interviewee the opportunity to respond, but also respect his or her right to refuse to discuss certain subjects or restrict access.

As noted, the second ethical concern relates to the purpose of the interview and the methodology – the way the interviewer conducts the interview. Interviewers have a responsibility to uphold the highest professional standards of their various disciplines and professions. They should strive to record information of lasting value and make that information accessible to researchers. Oral history, observed the Oral History Association, “should be conducted in a spirit of critical inquiry and social responsibility and with a recognition of the interactive and

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subjective nature of the enterprise.”[\[6\]](#) This statement of ethical principle involves several considerations. First, the interviewee must be aware that an oral history interview is being conducted and that it is being recorded. It should be conducted in accordance with any stipulations previously agreed upon. Also, the process and methodology as designed and implemented should minimize the interviewer's influence in the interview. The interviewer should never allow his judgment or opinions to slant or color the interview in any way.

The National Park Service and its representatives have a responsibility always to use the highest ethical standards in creating and preserving oral history interviews. They also have a responsibility to make the interviews known and available for research and to ensure compliance with the letter and spirit of any agreement made with the interviewee.

Legal Considerations

The interviewer has certain legal as well as ethical responsibilities, especially when representing a federal agency such as the National Park Service. Occasionally the contents of a taped interview can become the source of confusion or conflict. Access to the interview tapes and transcripts must be carefully balanced with the intellectual property rights and the privacy rights of both the interviewer and interviewee. For a fuller discussion of the legal considerations, see John A. Neuenschwander's excellent pamphlet, *Oral History and the Law*.[\[7\]](#)

Neuenschwander provides a valuable discussion of copyright concerns and legal release agreements, as well as issues related to libel and slander. Other good sources are the NPS *Museum Handbook*, and Diane Vogt-O'Connor's "A Precarious Balance. Collections Access and Intellectual Property Rights," *Cultural Resource Management*, No. 5, 2000, pp. 61-65.

Defamation and Libel

Among the most important legal issues that anyone involved in an oral history project or interview must be aware of are defamation and libel. Defamation and libel are false statements of fact printed or broadcast about a person that can injure that person's reputation, holding them up to public ridicule and contempt. A cause of action for libel arises when defamatory language is in a written form. Libel is a concern to the interviewer and to the park or program that makes a tape or transcript containing defamatory language available to researchers. While the interviewee is liable for his defamatory language initially, anyone who repeats, republishes, or redistributes a defamatory statement made by another can be held liable as well. Individuals whom interviewees may libel or defame can sue the interviewee, the interviewer, and even the repository that holds the interview. Use common sense. If an interviewee says something extremely negative about an individual that has not been published previously, consider deleting that portion of the interview.

For a successful claim of libel, the following elements must be present. The language in question must be defamatory, and the plaintiff can be identified through the language. In addition, the language must be published, but the "publication" can take various forms. The publication element can simply mean that the defamatory words were communicated to a third person. Finally, the plaintiff's reputation must be damaged and in the cases of public figures, actual malice must be proved.

Proving that the statement in question is true is a successful defense against charges of libel. There is no defamation if the statement can be proven to be true. Also, to be defamed, the individual must be alive at the time the charge is made. In other words, the deceased cannot be defamed. Another defense is that the language is construed as an opinion rather than fact. To avoid any future libel disputes, it is best not to retain or publish anything in an interview that might damage a living person's reputation.

Privacy

Legal issues related to privacy are directly related to concerns about defamation and libel. Generally, privacy issues are handled much in the same way as libel, but there are some differences. In

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privacy cases, truth is not an absolute defense as it is in libel cases. Invasion of privacy involves the following four causes of action: intrusion into one's private affairs; disclosure of intimate or embarrassing private facts; the commercial use of an individual's name or likeness without permission; and placing someone in a "false light" in the public view. False light involves making a statement or representation that is not defamatory or libelous, but that is also not true. If, for example, the interviewee relates a non-libelous story about a third party that would give the public a false impression about that third person, the interviewee may have violated that person's privacy by putting him or her "in false light."

The right of privacy focuses on the mental harm inflicted. A right of privacy claim must have three elements: the use of one's name or image in an identifiable manner, without consent, and for the benefit of the defendant. Generally, only the person who is injured may assert a claim, and the plaintiff must be living.

Staff training is an important element in preventing libel and privacy issues. Prepare interviewers and transcribers to be alert for potentially defamatory language. Interviewers should use common sense. If the interviewee makes a statement that is extremely negative about a living individual and that information has not previously been published, edit out the defamatory words or delete the identity of the subject. One way to reduce the risk of legal entanglements is to be honest and candid with the interviewee and follow the ethical practices outlined in the previous section. An alert and skilled interviewer can steer the interview away from a discussion of information that may be libelous or violate someone's right to privacy. Transcribers and editors can also help identify potentially damaging material. At the park level, managers of the oral history collection can ensure that the agreed-upon use restrictions are fully honored and enforced.

Copyright

The issue of copyright or ownership of the interview tape and transcript is critical and must be adequately addressed in the interview process. Under federal copyright law, anyone whose words are recorded or reproduced retains copyright over the recording and the resulting transcript. Copyright is defined as the rights granted by law that give the owner of an original creative work the ability to prevent others from using the work without the owner's permission. Copyright begins the moment an original work is created, or in the case of an oral history interview – as soon as the interviewee stops talking. The interviewee - and often the interviewer as well - are usually deemed to be the author or creator of the taped interview and hold the copyright. The park or program responsible for the oral history project must at some point secure the transfer of the interviewee's, and if applicable the interviewer's copyright interest, to the federal government, the National Park Service, or the park by means of a legal release or deed of gift.

The Copyright Act of 1976, as amended by the Sonny Bono Copyright Extension Act and the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in 1998, is a federal statute that provides exclusive copyright protection for original works of authorship created after January 1, 1978. Under the 1976 Act, copyright protection is given automatically to original works that are expressed in a fixed, tangible medium. It does not extend to ideas, procedures, facts, processes, concepts, principles, or discoveries. Works of authorship protected by copyright include literary works, photographs, maps, sculpture, architectural plans, audiovisual works, musical works, sound recordings such as tape recordings, and architectural works (e.g. buildings). Unpublished works automatically qualify for copyright protection provided they are original and fixed in a tangible medium of expression.

Copyright conveys certain legal rights. The copyright owner has the **exclusive** right to reproduce the work, distribute it to the public, prepare derivative works, display the work, and perform the work publicly. For copyright purposes, it is important to identify the author. Often the sole copyright owner is the creator or the author of the work. When a work is a "joint work" prepared by two or more authors with the intent to merge their contributions into a single product, as is often the case with an oral history interview, the authors share copyright ownership. If an employee prepared the work within the scope of his or her employment (a "work for hire"), the employer owns the copyright. For Commissioned Works, the independent contractor commissioned to create a work is the initial owner of copyright unless there is a written, signed agreement that the work is a "work for hire" and that it fits into one of nine categories enumerated

Park Service does not hold copyright in the oral histories that its employees produce. As soon as the interviewee transfers his or her copyright to the park, the Park Service, or the federal government, the interview can be released to the “public domain” and can be used by others without obtaining permission from the author or his heirs.

However, if the interviewer is a contractor the situation is a bit more complex. Independent contractors with grants, agreements, or contracts with the federal government retain copyright for the works they create unless the terms of their contract, agreement, statutes or regulations stipulate otherwise. There are two ways for an interviewer who is an independent contractor or a volunteer to convey copyright. Before the interview, they can sign a “work for hire” agreement that makes the employer the author or they can sign an agreement in which they transfer or “assign” copyright to the federal government. Their contract must either stipulate that copyright belongs to the federal government or include the phrase “this is a work for hire.”

How long does copyright last? For works created during or after 1978, copyright is protected until 70 years after the death of the creator. For works for hire or anonymous or pseudonymous authors, copyright extends 95 years from publication or 120 years from creation, whichever is shorter. For items published before 1978 the law is different. Any work published before 1923 is in the public domain. Works published from 1923-1963 are also in the public domain if the copyright was never renewed. However, if the copyright was renewed, protection extends for 95 years from publication. With works published from 1964-1977, copyright extends 95 years from publication.

For works created before January 1, 1978 but never published or registered, the copyright is protected for the life of the creator, plus 70 years, or at least until December 31, 2002, whichever is greater. If a work was created before January 1, 1978 and published between January 1, 1978, and December 31, 2002, copyright is protected for the life of the creator plus 70 years or until December 31, 2047, whichever is greater.

Infringement of copyright occurs when the copyrighted work is reproduced, distributed or displayed to the public, or performed for the public without the permission of the author or his heirs. Libraries and archives, however, may reproduce and distribute a single copy of the work if there is no commercial motive, the collections are open to the public or researchers, and the reproduction includes a copyright notice. Copyright law provides a defense against copyright infringement called “fair use.” Simply put, the “fair use” defense permits the use of the copyrighted material for teaching and educational purposes, scholarly research, and a few other very specific purposes.

Deed of Gift/Legal Release

As noted, to minimize the risk of legal problems, oral history projects and programs must use written agreements that specifically govern intellectual property rights and ownership of the interview material. These agreements should be kept on file for easy reference. Park Service staff should seek prior written permission from the author or authors of the work [the interviewer(s) and interviewee(s)], to avoid allegations of copyright infringement or privacy violation claims. This written permission provides a strong, effective defense against copyright infringement or invasion of privacy.

Effective written agreements to transfer rights and ownership can take several forms. A deed of gift agreement can be used to transfer all rights and title to an interview. A different, but similar, legal vehicle for conveying all rights and title is a contractual legal release agreement. Either a deed of gift or legal release agreement should be signed at the time of the interview. When a Park Service employee is conducting the interview, both the interviewer and interviewee should sign a legal release. Appendix B contains a model legal release form. If the interviewer is not a Federal employee (a contractor or volunteer for example), the interviewer should execute a separate deed of gift with the Park Service using Form 10-830 (Rev. May 2003) “Deed of Gift” out of the National Park Service’s *Museum Handbook*, provided in Appendix C. If the National Park Service is accepting or acquiring interview materials from outside the Federal government, also use Form 10-830 in Appendix C.

The most desirable transfer is one in which the interviewee assigns copyright to the National Park Service to use the interview recording and related materials as it sees fit and to deposit it in its collections. Depending on the nature and purpose of the oral history project, you may want to ensure that nothing in the transfer instrument precludes use of part or all of the interview material on the Internet or in any other manner. In rare instances, the interviewees may retain copyright and require that they or their heirs be consulted before the material is released. In other instances, they may assign copyright to the Park Service but stipulate that all or part of the interview be closed for a period of time. However, the Park Service has no clear legal authority to restrict public access and cannot guarantee its ability to uphold such restrictions. Be candid with the interviewee about the potential problems that could arise by attaching restrictions to the tape and transcript. As noted earlier, it is wise to avoid attaching any provisions that would restrict access to the interview if possible. More important, the interviewer and interviewee need to discuss the copyright issue and agree on the terms of the interview before the paperwork is signed and the interview begins.

Freedom of Information Act

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), Title 5 U.S. Code, Section 552, makes most Federal records available to the public and outlines the procedures that citizens must use to gain access to these records. Certain categories of information such as personnel files or trade secrets are exempt. Exemption 6 allows the federal government to withhold all information about individuals in personnel and medical files and similar files when disclosing such information would constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. If a park accepts the donation of an interview that carries with it restriction on access or photocopying, it is doubtful that the park will be able to honor such a restriction if there is a FOIA request for it. FOIA requests can supersede any restrictions placed on tapes. The bottom line is that an interviewer can never guarantee the confidentiality of an interview because of FOIA, and the interviewer has an obligation to convey this risk to the interviewee.

There are some other FOIA exemptions that might be relevant. For example, under the National Historic Preservation Act, information concerning the character of property that could endanger a site can be redacted. Under the Archeological Resources Protection Act, information about the location of an archeological site can be exempted when making the site known could endanger the site. The Endangered Species Act also provides an exemption.

The law related to oral history continues to evolve. Unless the circumstances are truly exceptional, parks should avoid conducting interviews with interviewees who do not sign a legal release or deed of gift form or who request restrictions. Restriction clauses or the absence of the signed release can cause future problems for park staff and will limit the usefulness of the interview material. When thorny questions arise concerning copyright, privacy, libel, access, or other legal concerns, contact the Department of the Interior's Office of the Solicitor for advice.

CONCLUSION

Oral history has been and will continue to be a very valuable resource for researchers within and outside the National Park Service. It can be an exceptional tool for Service professionals and others who seek to preserve and document cultural and historical memory in the parks or in the Service itself. Moreover, as noted earlier, oral history is directly linked to the Service's mission of preserving cultural and natural resources and educating the public about those resources. Yet, for oral history to reach its full potential the interviews must be planned, organized, conducted, processed, and managed in accordance with the highest professional standards. Service professionals, contractors, and volunteers must conduct their interviews and handle the resulting products with the utmost concern for the legal and ethical issues involved and take all the appropriate measures to preserve those products so that they are available to researchers for many years to come.

APPENDIX A

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW LOG

Project Name _____

Interview No. _____

Page ____ of ____ pages

Interviewee's Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Date of Birth _____

Interviewer's Name _____

Address _____

Telephone _____

Date of Birth _____

Date/Place of Interview

Purpose of Interview

Type and Number of Tapes _____

Speed _____

Transcribed? ____ Reference Cassette copy made? ____ Edited? ____

Release Form? ____ Distributed? ____

Translator information (if applicable) _____

Contents of tape: *(Include names and terms that may need clarification during the transcription process; use additional sheets, if necessary)*

APPENDIX B

Model Legal Release

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

This agreement is entered into by _____ (*interviewee*) and _____ (*park or project name*) of the National Park Service. Both parties enter into this agreement in order to facilitate the future use of the oral history interview conducted on this date, _____, for historical and educational purposes.

The interviewee herein grants, relinquishes, and transfers to the National Park Service the following rights:

1. All legal title and property rights for said interview.
2. All rights, title, and interest in copyrights in said interview, and more particularly, the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, and public display.

I, _____ (*interviewee*) herein warrant that I have not assigned or in any manner encumbered or impaired any of the aforementioned rights in my oral memoir. I hereby authorize the National Park Service to record, transcribe, and edit the interview, and to use and re-use the interview in whole or in part. I understand that the National Park Service shall have no

I obligation to use the interview. I further understand that I am to receive no financial compensation for my participation in the project.

Interviewer, on behalf of the NPS

Date

Interviewee

Date

APPENDIX C

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
ACCESSION NUMBER

DEED OF GIFT

NAME OF DONOR(S) TELEPHONE NUMBER (Give Area Code)

ADDRESS (Number, Street, City, State and Zip)

Whereas the National Park Service is dedicated to the preservation and protection of objects significant to the interpretation of the National Parks throughout the United States,

I/We do hereby irrevocably and unconditionally give, assign, and deliver to the National Park Service, for its unrestricted use, all right, title, and interest in, to, and associated with the item(s) listed below.

I/We do hereby irrevocably and unconditionally give, assign, and deliver to the National Park Service, for its unrestricted use, all copyright, trademark, and related rights and interest in, to, and associated with the item(s) listed below.

I/We certify that I/we hold free and clear title to the subject property and any copyright, trademark, and related rights an interest in, to, and associated with the subject property, and that I/we may dispose of it in any manner that I/we may determine.

DONOR(S) SIGNATURE (Please use ball point pen)

SIGNATURE DATE

SIGNATURE DATE

DESCRIPTION AND CONDITION OF OBJECTS

The National Park Service hereby gratefully acknowledges the receipt of the item(s) listed above.

SIGNATURE DATE

I
TITLE
PARK
ADDRESS

GIFTS TO THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE AS CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTIONS, HOWEVER IT IS THE DONOR'S RESPONSIBILITY TO SECURE APPRAISALS TO SUPPORT DEDUCTIONS. (See IRS Pamphlet 561)

FORM 10•830 Rev May 2003

APPENDIX D

U.S. Department of the Interior

National Park Service

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH AGREEMENT

Park Code: _____

The use of this park's oral history materials, including tapes, transcripts, and associated documentation is freely granted to all responsible researchers, subject to the following rules:

1. A researcher must register each time he/she uses the oral history collection.
2. A researcher must state the reason(s) for use.
3. No oral history materials may be reproduced without permission of the park staff.
4. The researcher assumes full responsibility for conforming to the laws of libel and copyright that may be involved in the use of any oral history materials in this collection. To the extent possible, park staff will assist in ascertaining the copyright status of materials.

I have read the rules listed above and agree to abide by them.

Signature _____ Date _____

Address _____

Telephone No. _____

Reason(s) for Use:

Materials Used:

Park Staff Signature _____

APPENDIX E

Translation and Transcription

The qualities of a good translator should include familiarity with cultural speech conventions; vocabulary particular to project goals; knowledge of age, sex, ethnic, or race factors affecting interviews; depending on project goals, ability to write in the native language, and ability to translate accurately without adding his or her own interpretations.

The translation project should be made explicit, so the reader can easily track how the English text was derived from the native language. The best translation method involves a multi-stage approach. First the spoken source language is transcribed verbatim. Next, the transcript is translated into English as carefully and literally as possible. In the third stage, it is translated more freely, in a more readable form. Ideally, there would be a fourth stage, in which the text is translated back to the source language and reviewed and corrected by the speaker in order to ensure that the translation is accurate.

Transcribers of languages other than English should avoid using international phonetic scripts. Most languages, including Native American languages, have easy to use transcription systems developed over the years by linguists, missionaries, and anthropologists. These systems should be used and native transcribers enlisted whenever possible.

When impossible to transcribe an interview in the native language, set up a sound system in which the transcriber can play the original recorded interview. The transcriber then orally translates the interview by phrases or other natural divisions of the interview. The new source-language interview and the translation are recorded on another recorder. For more detailed information about translations and transcription, see the references provided in the bibliography for this handbook.

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[1] For definitions of oral history, see Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995), p. 1; Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan, "A Guide to Oral History Interviews," Technical Leaflet #210, *History News*, vol. 55, no. 3, (American Association for State and Local History, 2000), p. 2; Marion Matters, comp. *Oral History Cataloging Manual* (Chicago: American Society of Archivists, 1995); David Henige, *Oral Historiography*, 1982; and Texas Historical Commission, "Fundamentals of Oral History: Texas Preservation Guidelines."

[2] See American Society of Landscape Architects, "Oral History Guidelines for Landscape Architects," 1990.

[3] P.L. 95-341; 42 USC 1996.

[4] Barbara W. Sommer and Mary Kay Quinlan, *Guide to Oral History Interviews*, p. 5.

[5] Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (Twayne Publishers, 1995), p. 43.

[6] Oral History Association. *Principles and Standards of the Oral History Association*.

[7] John A. Neuenschwander, *Oral History and the Law* (Carlisle, PA: Oral History Association Pamphlet Series #1, 3d ed., 2002).