

Southern Oral History Program

A Practical Guide to Oral History

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MISSION

"You don't have to be famous for your life to be history."

These words, spoken by Nell Sigmon when she was interviewed by the Southern Oral History Program (SOHP) in 1979, serve as our unofficial motto. They remind us of the extraordinary significance of ordinary lives and guiding our efforts to seek out and record memories of the Southern past.

People make sense of their lives through story. The South is especially rich in storytellers, yet many of them leave no written record, and modern forms of communication have made personal letters and diaries virtually obsolete. This creates a sense of urgency behind the work at the SOHP to record these stories on paper and in sound so that we don't lose them. Oral history allows us to use those stories to explore the private dimension of public life and events, to add new voices to the historical record, to track the creation and re-creation of historical memory, to build bridges between generations and between the university and the community, to inspire cutting edge scholarship on the South, and to present history to the public in creative new forms that harness the power of digital technologies.

For forty-five years, the SOHP has preserved the voices of the southern past and present. We have recorded and collected 6,000 interviews with men and women—from mill workers to civil rights leaders to a future president of the United States. Made available to the public through UNC's renowned Southern Historical Collection, these priceless recordings and transcripts capture the vivid personalities, poignant personal stories, and behind-the-scenes decision-making that bring history to life. Through the pioneering, innovative use of web-based technologies and digital media, we are now seeking to revolutionize public, direct access to oral history materials; we currently manage one of the biggest collections of digital oral histories in the nation. We also maintain an active research and teaching program, with a current focus on projects such as *Stories to Save Lives: Health, Illness and Medical Care in the South*, and *Southern Mix: Asian and Asian-American Voices in the South*. Our goals at the SOHP are to:

- Create an unparalleled archive of sound recordings documenting life in the 20th and 21st century South, and publications and documentaries that offer a fresh understanding and promote cutting-edge scholarship on the modern South.
- Attract exceptional students, provide them with hands-on, original research opportunities, and encourage them to combine scholarship with public service.
- Make history accessible through workshops, presentations, collaborations with public schools, with an emphasis on understanding the roots of current issues. We have a highly successful undergraduate internship program and graduate field scholar positions to engage that community on campus and to assist us in further reaching out to the public. Books, articles, public performances,

photographic exhibits, films, and videos allow us to carry history back to the communities that have been our teachers.

Before You Begin

Questions to ask yourself before you begin an oral history project:

1. What subject you want to investigate?
2. What are your goals in undertaking this project? What do you want this project to do?
3. What does your narrator(s) get from this project?
4. What are you doing to do with the interviews?
5. What kinds of materials will the project generate? (audio recordings, film, photographs, supplemental and archival documents)?

With these broad questions answered, you can more easily tackle the nuts and bolts:

1. Who would make a great narrator? How many interviews will you conduct?
2. What kind of help are you going to need with this project (collaborators)?
3. What equipment do you require?
4. What is your timeline?
5. What kind and amount of background research should you conduct?
6. What funds will you need? Where might you obtain these funds?

Oral History Interviewing

An oral history interview involves complex social interactions; no rigid formula can guarantee success. Respect for the sanctity and complexity of human lives, intelligence, empathy, flexibility – all these personal qualities influence the interview situation. The following suggestions are meant to facilitate this process.

PREPARATION

1. Begin by defining your project. Only then can you decide whom to interview and what to ask.
2. In order to handle the problem of interview bias, you must explore your own assumptions, values, and attitudes. An interview does not call for an impossible neutrality. It does demand special self-awareness and self-discipline.
3. Before conducting your first interview, do your background research. Oral history cannot be separated from or substituted for other methods of historical research.
4. Select narrators who will be able and willing to be interviewed. Narrators may be chosen because their lives illustrate certain historical themes or because they have special knowledge of or occupy a unique position in a historical event, movement, or institution.
5. Either in writing or in person (preferably followed by a letter or email of confirmation), ask permission to conduct the interview and explain its purpose. Provide a description of the project and explain what the process of an interview entails. Mention any release forms you will be using. This is a good time to make certain that the narrator understands that the materials may be deposited in an archive. In the course of this conversation, be sensitive to any hesitation on the narrator's part. Emphasize the importance of preserving these stories and making them available to later generations. Be reassuring about the fact that these are spoken reminiscences, not polished, grammatical essays.
6. Draw up a list of the topics or specific questions to be explored. You will want to refer to these questions during the interview, but you should not feel constrained by them.
7. Choose a time and place for the interview with the narrator. Pick a setting that will maximize the narrator's comfort, and absolutely avoid places where there will be distracting background noise.
8. Prepare any release forms or other paperwork that may be necessary.
9. Before the interview, become extremely familiar with your equipment, like the back of your hand. Practice recording friends talking, make sure you set your levels well before you even start your interview, keep your eye on the numbers and battery level to make sure everything continues to work during your interview. The more comfortable and familiar you

are with your equipment, the less attention you'll draw to it, the more comfortable your narrator will be.

THE INTERVIEW

1. Set aside at least two hours for the interview to have time to set up equipment, answer any questions, and conduct the interview.
2. Set up your recording equipment in an extremely quiet location. Take the time to find the quietest space. If there are background noises (fans, air conditioning, etc.), or other problems with the recording, this will be the moment to address such issues. Absolutely NO televisions or radios in the background. Turn them off!
3. Slate the recording: Introduce yourself and your narrator, the date, the location, of your interview. Have your narrator introduce his/her/them/self
4. Interviews may be autobiographical or topical. In either case, begin at a point in time previous to the central events you want to explore. For all interviews, include basic information regarding birthplace, date of birth, and family of origin; it will help establish both a context for the interview and a level of comfort with the narrator.
5. You should seek a balance in which you allow narrators to express the logic of their lives as they understand it, while at the same time maintaining a sense of the overall direction of the conversation and framing questions to elicit information that pertains to your area of interest. Listen carefully. Do not be afraid of silence. Allow the narrator time to think, to continue after a pause. Critically evaluate the flow of information, so that you can ask for elaboration where the narrator's statements are unclear. Take notes that will remind you to ask follow-up questions at an opportune moment, rather than interrupting the narrator's train of thought.
6. Avoid leading or prejudicial questions. Your questions should be open-ended and should not supply a list of alternative answers. They should be direct and to the point. Avoid asking several questions in the guise of one. Frame questions within a language and context understood by the narrator.
7. It may be helpful to arrange the sequence of topics so as to postpone until last questions that may be threatening or challenging to the narrator. Within each topic, it may be helpful to begin with a broad question, then ask successively narrow and detailed questions as the conversation proceeds.
8. When an narrator seems unwilling or unable to provide certain information, try approaching the topic from another angle, indicating contradictory information that you have obtained from other sources; alternatively, wait until later in the interview to return to

the topic. When appropriate, mention that it will be possible to restrict the interview according to the narrator's wishes.

9. Ordinarily an interview session should last no more than 90 minutes. Be alert to signs of fatigue, distraction, or boredom. Conduct a long interview in separate sessions.
10. Have the narrator fill out and sign the release forms. Sign the release form after your narrator signs in and give your narrator a copy to keep. Do not leave the interview without a signed release form!

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

1. Immediately after the session, write up your field notes. Field notes should include: the names of yourself and your narrator; the date, time, and location of the narrator, and a description of the interview itself. Describe the setting, other people present; any pertinent events that happened prior to, during, or after the interview; observations that were not captured in the audio recording; and your honest reflections on whatever dynamics occurred during the interview/visit.
2. Send a written thank you to the narrator.
3. Label your recordings, notes, and any other materials neatly and consistently; this will help you organize them and manage them later.
4. Decide how you will store and organize your recordings, transcripts, copies of release forms, and other narrator information; if you are planning to deposit your oral history in an archive, consult them about format, labeling, and organization of materials.
5. Listen to the recording and evaluate both your own behavior and the content of the interview. Only by such self-criticism can you learn from your mistakes and refine your interviewing skills.
6. Decide whether or not a follow-up interview will be necessary. It is often helpful to conduct follow-up sessions after you have analyzed the content of the interview and as your understanding of the research problem evolves.
7. Once the interview is done, "history making" begins. The interview is raw data which must be compared to and used in conjunction with other evidence. Oral history starts with the collection, transcription/indexing, and preservation of interviews. But its goal is historical synthesis and interpretation. Remember that it is a collaborative effort; consider the ways in which you can engage your narrator in this interpretive process.

10 Tips for Interviewers

1. Choose a quiet locale and properly position your microphones.
2. Ask one question at a time. State your questions as directly as possible.
3. Ask open-ended questions—questions that begin with “why, how, where, what kind of,” etc.
4. Start with non-controversial questions. One good place to begin, for instance, is with the narrator’s childhood, or where they grew up and have them describe it.
5. Understand that periods of silence will occur. These are useful periods of reflection and recollection for your narrator.
6. Avoid interrupting the narrator.
7. If the narrator strays away from the topic in which you are interested, don’t panic. Sometimes the best parts of the interview come about this way. If you feel the digression has gone too far afield, gently steer the narrator back to the topic with your next question.
8. Be respectful of the narrator. Use body language to show you are interested in what he or she has to say. Remember, the narrator is giving you the gift of his or her memories and experiences.
9. After the interview, thank the narrator for sharing his or her experiences. Also send a written thank-you note.
10. Don’t use the interview to show off your knowledge, charm, or other attributes. Remember, “good interviewers never shine—only their interviews do.”

Sensitive Materials + Oral History Guidelines

Prepared by the Southern Oral History Program, September 2016

These guidelines reflect the SOHP's practices and decision-making processes and may be subject to change. Those who collaborate with the SOHP are encouraged to follow these guidelines. They are not meant to be broadly prescriptive, however, and individuals and institutions are encouraged to develop guidelines and practices that best meet their needs.

In conducting oral history interviews, we seek to document history and individuals' remembrances of the past and their lived experiences. We encourage narrators to be open and honest, and because of the nature of the work, this occasionally includes information that is sensitive in some way or that the narrator does not want publicly available. These guidelines serve to aid in decision-making about sensitive interviews, restrictions, and removing interviews from the collection. For additional reading, see *A Guide to Oral History and the Law* by John Neuenschwander.

Determining whether materials are sensitive

- "Sensitive" materials may mean many things to many people. SOHP operates under the definition that an interview may be sensitive if it includes references or language that might cause embarrassment or personal or professional harm to either the narrator or to those mentioned in an interview. This could include (but is not limited to) topics of sexuality, illness (physical or mental), legal status, or unsavory characterizations of individuals or groups, as well as the scenarios as described below (defamation, accusations of criminal activity or unethical behavior, mandatory reporting scenarios, privacy concerns).
- First and foremost, if a narrator indicates that any content is sensitive, we respect and honor their judgment regarding what they consider sensitive or private. This is accomplished by enforcing restrictions, which is described below.
- Be mindful of narrators saying things like "off the record" or "don't repeat this," and restrict accordingly. You may also turn off the recorder if the narrator wishes to share a story with you but does not intend for it to be part of the public record.
- If the interview contains sensitive material, the narrator, interviewer, donor, project director, SOHP faculty/staff, or others may wish to restrict access or close from public use and access.
- The SOHP generally defers to the narrator, interviewer, donor, or project director to determine whether an interview contains sensitive material and should be restricted. If you collaborate with the SOHP, it is your responsibility to determine this prior to depositing materials in the SOHP's archives.
- SOHP faculty/staff may choose to enforce a restriction that the narrator did not suggest to the degree that there could be reasonable concern that the sensitive content might cause personal or professional harm.

Potential Scenarios

- Interviewers should express to the narrators that there are both laws and policies that require reporting (see mandatory reporting below). You may say something like “to the extent required by university policy and law, you consent to us disclosing this interview and related materials for that purpose.” We encourage individuals and institutions to learn about policies and laws relevant to them.

Defamation

- John Neuenschwander describes defamation as a false statement that may cause “injury to one’s reputation.” (32)
- Considering the extent of potentially defamatory language, the interviewer or project director may discuss restriction options with the narrator and restrict accordingly. See below. If you collaborate with the SOHP, you should discuss and determine appropriate restrictions prior to depositing materials in the SOHP's archives.
- Accusations of criminal activity or unethical behavior
- Consider the content shared and the language used. There is a difference between opinion/speculation and supported facts. Be mindful of mandatory reporting scenarios.
- Again, the interviewer or project director may discuss restriction options with the narrator and restrict accordingly. See below. Again, if you collaborate with the SOHP, discuss and determine restrictions prior to depositing.

Mandatory reporting – by North Carolina law

- “Everyone has a duty to report to law enforcement (UNC Dept. of Public Safety) reasonable suspicions that a child has disappeared or is in danger, § 14-318.5(c), or has been abused or neglected, § 7B-301. Failure to report is a class 1 misdemeanor (up to 120 days of punishment). Here is a handy guide prepared by our School of Government: <http://nccriminallaw.sog.unc.edu/north-carolinas-caylees-law/>.”
- This reporting obligation applies with respect to children under 16 at the time the information is received (e.g. not an adult recalling something that happened in their childhood).
- An interviewer who has reasonable cause to believe that a disabled adult is in need of protective services shall notify his/her supervisor, who will report the same to the county department of social services pursuant to N.C. Gen. Stat. § 108A-102.

Mandatory reporting according to UNC policy

- Discrimination, harassment, and related misconduct (<http://policies.unc.edu/files/2013/04/PPDHRM.pdf>)
- Responsible employees at UNC are required to report, and other employees are strongly encouraged but not required to report. See more about responsible employees (part of the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office): <http://eoc.unc.edu/what-we-do/address-misconduct/responsible-employees/>
- Protection of minors (<http://policies.unc.edu/policies/protection-of-minors/>)

- Violence in the workplace (<http://hr.unc.edu/policies-procedures-systems/spa-employee-policies/employee-relations/violence-in-the-workplace-policy/>)
 - There is a strong temporal component here as well. There is no obligation to report violence in the workplace that occurred in the past, but if violence is currently in process and/or there are immediate threats at the time of the interview, it must be reported.
 - Misuse of state property by state employees (from *UNC Policy Manual* 300.8.4[G]
<http://www.northcarolina.edu/apps/policy/index.php?pg=vs&id=3767>)

Other privacy concerns

- Do not include a narrator's full date of birth in the abstract, field notes, or transcript.
- In rare cases, we allow a narrator to use a pseudonym. In such cases, be mindful of any slip-ups in the interview materials (especially transcript, abstract, or field notes) or mention of easily identifiable information (such as place of residence). Restrict accordingly. If you collaborate with the SOHP, discuss pseudonym options prior to depositing. It is your responsibility to ensure anonymity.

Restricting for access and use

- *You can always offer to turn off the recorder if a narrator wants to share information that they do not intend to (ever) appear in the public record.*
- First and foremost, we honor the narrator's judgment on sensitive content and their requests to restrict materials.
- The narrator can request restrictions in the following ways at the SOHP:
 - When using an SOHP interviewer agreement form, narrators may indicate restrictions on the form. They can choose to close the interview for 5, 10, or 15 years, or they can choose to use a pseudonym.
 - It is possible to restrict an interview for longer than 15 years (e.g. when a narrator is very young). This option is not included on the standard agreement form, but narrators and interviewers may approach SOHP leadership when this is a desirable option to enforce.
- If you are collaborating with the SOHP, be sure to use the SOHP's current interview agreement form. We encourage individuals and institutions beyond SOHP to develop and use an interview agreement form that best meets their needs.
- Narrators may request restrictions through other communications with the interviewer, SOHP staff, or library staff. It is preferable to have the narrator sign a new release form to reflect any updated restrictions or to document the request through written communication. No restriction beyond what was originally indicated on the release form is guaranteed.

- Responsibility for identifying sensitive materials and suggesting restrictions falls primarily on the interviewer/donor/project director conducting the oral history project.
- Interviews that are conducted in collaboration with or outside of the SOHP but are donated to our collection should be vetted by the relevant interviewers/ donors/project directors before depositing with the SOHP. The SOHP generally does not make decisions about restrictions beyond the narrator/interviewer/donor/project director's decision and does not assume responsibility for finding and/or redacting any or all sensitive content.
- SOHP leadership may also enforce restrictions at their discretion, particularly when there could reasonably be concern that the sensitive content might cause personal or professional harm to the narrator or others mentioned in the interview.
- For example, the SOHP director may choose to extend a restriction beyond the narrator's requested closure duration
- Wilson Library's policy is to either close an interview for 5, 10, or 15 years or to deposit it with no restrictions so that it is open to researchers. We will no longer make conditional restrictions, such as an interview only being accessible with the narrator's written permission. Open means both accessible and usable online and on site.

Freedom of Information Act and North Carolina Public Records Law

- We encourage individuals and institutions to learn about policies and laws relevant to them.
- The University is subject to both the federal and state freedom of information/open records laws. If restricted interviews are requested, the University may in certain cases dispute or claim an exemption, but this is not a guarantee.
- This is indicated on our release/deed of gift forms to ensure narrators understand the limitations of our restrictions.
- Requests are made public online through UNC public records office website: <http://publicrecords.unc.edu/>

Closing after the fact and removing an interview from the archives

- The SOHP may close or remove an interview that has been fully processed from the archives on a narrator / interviewer / project director's request. Requests should be made to the SOHP. SOHP leadership reserves rights to close or remove interviews.

Editing practices

- Transcripts
 - SOHP sends the transcript back to the narrator for edits. If we don't hear back after 60 days, we assume the narrator approves of the transcript as-is.
 - If the narrator indicates that something was meant to be off the record, edit the transcript accordingly
- Audio
 - Generally we maintain the original audio file as-is, even when the transcript is edited. It is unusual to edit the audio unless a narrator specifically requests it or SOHP leadership determines it is necessary. In these exceptional cases, leave the original audio as-is and edit the access copy of the audio. You must discuss this with SOHP beforehand.

EQUIPMENT

- You will be assigned a Zoom audio recorder kit for your summer research. You will either receive a Zoom H5 or Zoom H4. Before you sign out a Zoom, you will need to sign a release form. If anything happens to the equipment in your possession, you will be responsible for replacing it.
- Make sure you spend plenty of time exploring how to use the equipment well before your first interview. Practice recording! Make sure you check your gear the night before an interview, and the morning before.
- Within each kit, there is a pair of headphones, a tripod for the recorder, a set of rechargeable batteries and accompanying charger, a 16GB SD flash memory card, a battery adapter, and windscreen for the microphone.
- With a 16GB flash card at the preferred recording settings (already set on the Zoom, so you don't have to worry about it!), you will have 8 hours and 20 minutes of recording time (WAV format at a rate of 24bit/48kHz).
- Use your smartphone to take a few strong portraits of your narrator. Allow them time to get camera-ready. Take the images outside in a natural light, or near a window with natural light. Take horizontal images for portraits. Collect a few images of the environment and landscape of your narrator. Consider taking images of your narrator's archival and personal photographs if they are sharing with you.
- If you really want to get into the world of audio equipment, you can learn more by visiting [Transom](#), which is a site for public radio producers but has great resources for recording audio interviews.

INTERVIEW FORMS

- **Interview Agreement** - This form must be signed for any interview to be used and deposited. It covers consent and permissions, and it can grant a license for use or convey rights, title, interest, and copyright. The interview subject should not sign the release form until after the interview has taken place. Be sure to obtain the narrator's contact information on the release form. No restrictions are required, but the narrator has the option to selecting restrictions listed on the release form. Be prepared to discuss restriction options.
- **Biographical Form** – A biographical form provides valuable information to potential researchers. Starting an interview with a biographical form is a good way to get the narrator talking about familiar subjects and become at ease. In addition, the biographical form gives narrators an opportunity to self-identify their race, ethnicity, and gender orientation. Be sure to gather correct contact information.
- **Proper Word Form** - Proper word forms aid in the transcription process and will save you time in edits. Throughout the interview, try to keep track of proper words, nicknames, acronyms, and other words someone unfamiliar with the narrator's history might not recognize right away. At the end of the interview, run through the list of words with the narrator correct any name and place spellings and specify what acronyms stand for. Proper spelling and complete names help future researchers by ensuring accuracy.
- **Field Notes** - Field Notes cover all aspects of the interview that a potential researcher could not glean from a transcript or the audio recording. This includes background noises and interruptions; personal interactions such as non-verbal cues and emotional behavior; personality characteristics of the narrator that affected the interview; and finally, any general observations the interviewer believes are important for future researchers to know.
- **Abstract** - The abstract is the first place a potential researcher will consult to find out the content of the interview. As such, it should be a written paragraph that covers all the major topics and subjects of the interview in chronological order of the audio recording. It should be clear and the information should be easy to access. Proper nouns and acronyms should be accurate and spelled out completely.

Southern Oral History Program

Informed Consent, Recording Authorization, and Permission to Use Material

The Southern Oral History Program ("SOHP") is a component of the Center for the Study of the American South at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill ("University"). Interviews and related materials conducted by the SOHP become part of the University's Southern Historical Collection in the Wilson Library, where they are preserved and made available to the public for use consistent with the University's mission, including but not limited to exhibitions, public programs, documentary films, radio broadcasts and publications in all formats and media, including the Internet.

This consent and permission is made to allow the University to conduct the interview and make it available to the public through the Southern Historical Collection. In return, the SOHP grants a nonexclusive license to utilize my interview/s and/or other Material. Before signing, please read it carefully and ask any questions you may have regarding its terms and conditions.

1. Consent to Interview

I hereby agree to be interviewed for a Southern Oral History Program research project and grant the University the right and permission to record my voice, likeness, image and/or performance through written, video, audio, photographic or other means. I understand that I am free to decline to answer any questions that make me uncomfortable or to stop the interview at any time.

2. Interview Materials Prepared by University

I understand that my story is my own, and I acknowledge and agree that the University may prepare materials in connection with the interview, including but not limited to transcripts, abstracts, field notes, audio recordings, tape logs, photographs and videos (hereinafter, "University Material"), which the University shall have sole ownership of. I understand that the Material may enter UNC's Southern Historical Collection in Wilson Library, and I hereby consent to the use of my name, likeness, image and/or voice that may be included in the University Material in connection with its use in exhibitions, public programs, documentary films, radio broadcasts, and publications in all formats and media, including on the Internet (examples may be seen here: www.lib.unc.edu/dc/sohp/).

I understand that I will have the opportunity to review and edit a written transcript of my interview before it is made publicly available.

3. Interview Materials Provided by Narrator

I herein freely share the Material with the SOHP and the Southern Historical Collection under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License. This means that I retain the copyright to the Material, but that the public may freely copy, modify, and share these items for non-commercial purposes under the same terms if they include original source information. I represent that, except where I indicate otherwise, I, to the best of my knowledge, hold the copyright or other proprietary right in the Narrator Material (defined below) or that the Narrator Material is in the public domain, and that I have authority to grant this permission. I hereby grant to the University and all persons or entities acting pursuant to its

authority a non-exclusive, royalty-free license in perpetuity to make any materials I provide or present in the course of my participation in the interview (e.g., personal documents, photographs, videos) (hereinafter, "Narrator Material") available on a free and open basis to the public, including the right to use, reproduce, exhibit, publish, edit, and distribute the Narrator Material in exhibitions, public programs, documentary films, radio broadcasts, and publications in all formats and media, including on the Internet..

4. Restrictions

I further understand and consent to the disclosure by the University, despite any restrictions requested below, of the interview, Narrator Material, and University Material that the University may be required to disclose under University policy or by law, including pursuant to the North Carolina Public Records Act, and that while SOHP will take reasonable efforts to implement the restrictions I indicate below, the University cannot guarantee that the restrictions will be achieved.

____ No restrictions.

____ I wish that my interview/s and other University and Narrator Materials not be made available until (circle one) 5 / 10 / 15 years from the date of my interview.

____ I wish to be identified by a pseudonym and have all references from which my identity could be known redacted until (circle one) 5 / 10 / 15 years from the date of this interview.

[Any additional restriction must be discussed with SOHP staff prior to implementation.]

Narrator signature

Interviewer signature

Date

Date

Street address

Street address

City, State, Zip code

City, State, Zip code

Email

Email

Telephone

Telephone

BIOGRAPHICAL FORM

(Note: Attach resume/bio sketch/profile if appropriate and available.)

Full Name: _____

Last

First

Middle

Suffix

Gender: _____ Ethnicity: _____ Race: _____

Email: _____ Telephone Number: _____ (home/work/cell)

Current Address: _____

Birthdate:

Birthplace:

Spouse's / Partner's name:

Children / Next of kin (name and year of birth):

Education:

Work/Occupational Experience:

FIELD NOTES – CATHERINE MALEY

(compiled September 25, 2008)

Narrator: Catherine Malley
Interviewer: Jennifer Donnally
Date: September 25, 2008
Location: Catherine Maley's home, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

NARRATOR. Catherine Maley is Professor Emerita of French and Romance Linguistics at the University of North Carolina. Born December 3, 1934 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, Maley was educated in private Catholic schools and earned a degree in English from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis St. Paul. After teaching at a local high school for several years, she went on to receive her PhD from the University of Michigan in Romance languages. Upon graduating, she was appointed the first female assistant professor in the French language department in 1970. She was on the ad hoc committee of the faculty council that recommended the establishment of a Committee on the Status of Women in 1971. Then, Chancellor Taylor appointed her chair of the first Committee on the Status of Women in 1972. She was former Director of the UNC Year and Semester programs in Montpellier, France and former Associate Dean of the Graduate School. She is the author of *The Pronouns of Address in Modern Standard French* (1974); *Hablemos Temas contemporaneos para conversar o escribir* (with M.A. Salgado) (1976); *Dans le vent* (4 editions: 1980, 1985, 1990, 1999); and co-editor (with L.D.King) of the *Proceedings of the XIII Annual Linguistic Symposium on Romance Languages* (1985). Currently, she is the President of the Institut Français de Washington.

THE INTERVIEWER. Jennifer Donnally is a graduate student in the Department of History at UNC-Chapel Hill, currently completing a dissertation concerning the rise of the pro-life movement in North Carolina and Massachusetts. Jennifer is a graduate research assistant for the Southern Oral History Program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. The interview was conducted in the living room of Catherine Maley's home, a comfortable venue. There was one brief interruption for a phone call and bathroom break. Several background noises occurred throughout, including a squirrel running into the window, police sirens in the background, air running through a vent, and the brush of a hand against a microphone. The interview lasted five and half hours, of which the interviewer only recorded two hours. On the whole, Maley

was gracious and willing to talk, and threw the interviewer off by jumping into important topics like the Committee on the Status of Women while the interviewer set up. Thus, some of the content of the interview was covered twice during the actual interview. It should be noted that this interview was part of a series of interviews on pioneering women faculty and administrators at the University of North Carolina.

NOTE ON RECORDING. I used the SOHP's Marantz recorder #16.

Writing Abstracts for SOHP Interviews

A good oral history interview deserves a well written, succinct abstract.

Purpose of the abstract

The abstract serves as the primary means of describing the interview for the research community. By writing clear, succinct abstracts, the interviewer can draw attention to the research value of her interviews. A good abstract does not mislead researchers by giving all topics equal weight. Interviews described by lengthy or poorly composed abstracts will not be used as frequently or substantively as those interviews that have well written abstracts.

A well written, succinct abstract provides researchers with the information they need to determine the relevance of the interview to their research questions. The interviewer should write the abstract for the research community of scholars, students, and family and community historians, who need or want to use oral history for their work or personal enrichment. Members of this audience likely do not know the subject matter covered in the interview as intimately as the interviewer, and more often than not they, like all of us, are overwhelmed by the abundance of resources available in the digital environment and left with little time to tarry over lengthy or opaque summaries. The abstract should help the researcher understand what the interview offers in as clear and brief a form as possible. It is not to be confused with a tape log.

Writing Guidelines

An effective abstract is written in complete, well-crafted sentences, and each sentence has syntactical logic, precise diction, and clarity. The abstract is not a regurgitation of facts and opinions mentioned in the interview or a listing of every topic or individual addressed during the recording. Rather it is a synthesis based on analysis of the interview.

Analysis requires examination of the entire interview and judicious selection of those parts of the interview that are most substantive and meaningful. The abstract synthesizes and characterizes the substantive content, provides some specific, relevant details, and reflects the relative weight or emphasis given to different topics.

Avoid words and phrases that describe the interview process or the progress of the interview, both of which are rarely relevant to a quick understanding the interview's research value for particular research questions.

Example of too much process and progress:

The interview begins with Jones discussing his efforts to organize a union in the mill where he worked for twenty years. He says that his efforts did not succeed and then discusses his inability to find allies among his coworkers. He also mentions the hostility he faced from managers and coworkers alike. The interview ends with Jones saying that he has no regrets about his unsuccessful attempts to found a union.

Description without the process and progress:

Jones discusses his unsuccessful attempts to organize a union in the mill where he worked for twenty years and describes his inability to find allies and the hostility he faced from both management and coworkers. Despite his lack of success, Jones states that he has no regrets.

The abstract should not contain many instances of the words *begin, end, also, or then* or any instance of the phrase *goes on to*.

In writing the abstract:

- Get straight to the point. Answers to the questions *who, what, when, and where* should appear in the first two sentences.

Example:

Aaron and Jenny Cavanaugh, long-time Duplin County, N.C. residents, lost their antiques business and turkey farm in the flooding that accompanied Hurricane Floyd in 1999. They spend much of this interview describing their response to the flood and their efforts to rebuild afterwards.

- Keep the biographical information to a minimum, selecting only those facts relevant to the interview's content. The abstract need not and should not attempt to tell a narrator's life history from cradle to grave.

Note in the example above how well the biographical information relevant to the interview is presented in the first sentence. By reading fewer than twenty-five words, a researcher knows where this couple lived, what they did for a living, and how one event affected their livelihood.

- Describe only the major threads in the interview and be specific. Name relevant persons, places, events, and organizations discussed at length by the narrator. Avoid long sentences with numerous phrases or clauses surrounded by semicolons.
- Employ precise diction and an economy of words. Avoid the wordiness of empty subject/predicate constructions, such as *there is* and *this was*. Condense and simplify where appropriate.

Example: Wordy

- *Born and raised in the South, Adele Clark was a founding member of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia and the League of Women Voters in Virginia. Clark first became involved in the suffrage movement in 1909, when she became the secretary of the Equal Suffrage League following its formation. Because of her position in the organization, Clark went to the National American Suffrage Association convention in Washington, D.C., in 1910 as an alternate delegate. (75 words)*

Condensed:

Adele Clark, founding member of the Equal Suffrage League (1909) and its successor the Virginia League of Women Voters (1920), attended the 1910 National American Suffrage Association convention in Washington, D.C., as an alternate delegate. (35 words)

Note in the condensed version only one small detail—her service as secretary in the ESL—is omitted, but all the relevant dates, events, and organizations remain.

- Avoid jargon and unfamiliar acronyms or initialisms (e.g., using STFU exclusively for Southern Tenant Farmers' Union).
- Keep the abstract to fewer than 350 words. An ideal length is about 250 words. Researchers should be able to read an abstract quickly.

ABSTRACT – Rebecca Judy

Narrator: Rebecca Judy

Interviewer: Jessica Wilkerson

Interview Date: May 10, 2011

Location: Knoxville, TN

Length: One hour, eight minutes

Rebecca Judy was born in 1940 in Putnam County, Tennessee. She worked for forty-one years as a social worker in East Tennessee, and she was instrumental in the Project Against Sexual Abuse of Appalachian Children and also worked as clinic supervisor at the Sexual Assault Center. The interview begins with a discussion of Judy's childhood and her family. She was the first female in her family to graduate from college; she attended Tennessee Tech University and graduate in 1962. She discusses moving to Sevierville, Tennessee and working in social services there, specifically advocating for girls in juvenile court. In 1965 she entered the University of Tennessee for graduate school in Social Work. She discusses how she navigated graduate school at the same time that she was starting a family. She discusses researching the *Gault* decision. She also began taking women's studies classes. She describes the barriers she faced to getting into law school and the limited options for women professionals. She describes her work at Child and Family Services in Knoxville, which included problem pregnancy referrals. She then talks about her participation in the reproductive rights movement and her role in educating the public about child abuse and rape, including the establishment of counseling sessions for women and children who had been sexually assaulted or sexually abused. She describes the messages that she received from the women's movement, her participation in consciousness-raising groups, how she defines feminism, the relationship of the civil rights and women's movements, and how she viewed women's liberation. This interview is part of the Southern Oral History Program's project to document the women's movement in the American South.