

Creating an Oral History

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Overview:

The grave of this unknown Douglas County resident is silent but speaks to the need to preserve oral history. The opportunity to preserve the history of this life was lost.

How to Record an Oral History

Before using the tape recorder stop and look at it, understand the instructions and how it works. No matter how perfectly your interview goes it is a terrible let-down to find your tape is blank. Use the AC power chord. Remember that cassette tapes have a few seconds of "lead time" and do not begin to record the moment you turn on the machine. Anything you attempt to record on either side for the first 10 seconds will be lost. The microphone is built into the case of the tape recorder. Be sure your subject is within three feet of it. His or her answers are more important than the questions

Avoid using close-ended questions that can be answered by "yes or no". Use open-ended questions that encourage thoughtful replies, such as "What do you remember about your first day of school?", "Who were your teachers?", "Where was the school?". Remember that a good interview is more a monologue than a dialogue.

It might be useful to record your oral history in segments rather than one long session. When a cassette reaches the end of side one turn it over to side two without rewinding it. During the interview, do not fiddle with the tape recorder without a good reason. Say the date, place and names of the participants at the beginning of the interview. Do not record near air conditioners in the summer or heating vents in the winter and be aware of background noises. Test your equipment and practice using it before you do the interview. After you have recorded both sides punch out the tabs on the back edge of the tape cassette so the tape can not be recorded over. Complete the label.

The questions included in this guide are helps only. Please select topics and questions that seem suitable. It is helpful if you jot down a short statement on the purpose of this interview and keep it within your view. "I'm going to gather information about _____" and stick to the subject before jumping to another topic.

If you wish for the History and Tourism Commission to assist you in the recording of the oral history, we will be happy to do so, if possible. If we assist you, the master tape will go into the County archives as "living history", and we will provide to you copies of the tape for your use. You can make as many duplicates of your copy as you wish.

If you wish to record the oral history on your own, we request that you allow us to have a copy of it for the County archives. ++++++

Questions

Read through these and select which ones might serve your interview.

- What is your full birth name? Were you named after somebody else?
- What state, county, and township you were born in?
- Where you born in a hospital or at home?
- What were the full names of your parents and where were they from?
- What were your parents like, how tall and how big? Was your father bald?
- How did your parents make a living?
- Who were your aunts and uncles? What were their names and what do you remember about them?
- What were the names of the spouses of your aunts and uncles, and what do you remember about them?
- Did your aunts and uncles have children, and what were their names?
- Are some of your cousins living now, if so, where do they live?
- When, Where, and How did your aunts and uncles die?
- Who were your favorite relatives, and why?
- Are your parents living today, if not, where are they buried? What state, county, and township?
- Where did you live as a child, and what was your home town like back then? Can you describe the house you grew up in for me? What do you miss most about it?
- How much schooling do you have? What was your favorite subject? What subject did you hate?
- Did you work as a child, and what did you do?
- When did you learn how to cook?
- What are some of your favorite recipes?
- What kind of food did your mother fix?
- Who were your best friends when you were growing up, and who were your neighbors?
- Where your grandparents living when you were growing up?
- If so, which grandparents where they (your father's parents or your mother's parents)?
- What were your grandparents' names?
- Do you recall any of your relatives talking about slavery? If, so what was said?
- What church did you attend as a child?
- Did most of your relatives go to that church?
- When and where did you get married?
- How long did you date your husband before you got married?
- Among your sisters and brothers give the ages of each one of them if they are living, and if they are deceased state their ages at the time of their death.
- Did you have a nickname as you were growing up?
- If you did, what was it and why did they call you that?
- Have you had other nicknames as an adult?
- What do family members call you now?
- Do you remember hearing your grandparents describe their lives? What did they say?
- Do you remember your great-grandparents? What do you know about them?
- Who was the oldest person you can remember in your family as a child? What do you remember about them?
- Do you remember your family discussing world events and politics?
- Was there a chore you really hated doing as a child?
- What would you consider to be the most important inventions that have been made during your lifetime?
- How is the world now different from what it was like when you were a child?
- What kinds of books did you like to read?

- Do you remember having a favorite nursery rhyme or bedtime story? What was it?
- Do you ever remember not having enough food to eat because times were hard for your family?
- What were your favorite toys and what were they like?
- What were your favorite childhood games?
- What were your schools like?
- How did you get to school?
- What was your favorite subject in school and why?
- What subject in school was always the easiest for you?
- What was your least favorite subject in school and why?
- Who was your favorite teacher and why were they special?
- How do your fellow classmates from school remember you best?
- What school activities and sports did you participate in?
- Did you and your friends have a special hang-out where you liked to spend time? Where was it and what did you do there?
- Were you ever given any special awards for your studies or school activities?
- How many years of education have you completed?
- Do you have a college degree? If so, what was your field of study?
- Did you get good grades?
- Did you like school?
- What did you like the most and the least about it?
- What did you usually wear to school? Describe it.
- Were there any fads during your youth that you remember vividly?
- How old were you when you started dating?
- Do you remember your first date? Describe the circumstances.
- Name a good friend that you have known for the longest period of time? How many years have you been friends?
- Has there ever been anyone in your life that you would consider to be your kindred spirit or soul mate? If so, who were they and why did you feel a special bond to them?
- How did you meet the person that you would later marry? Describe them?
- Do you remember where you went on the first date with your spouse?
- How long did you know them before you got married?
- Describe your wedding proposal.
- When and where did you get married?
- Describe your wedding ceremony. Who was there?
- Did you have a honeymoon? If so, where did you go?
- How would you describe your spouse? What do (did) you admire most about them?
- How long have you been married (or were you married)?
- What wise advice would you give to a grandchild on their wedding day?
- How did you find out that you were going to be a parent for the first time?
- How many children did you have all together?
- What were their names, birth dates and birthplaces?
- Do you remember anything that your children did when they were small that really amazed you?
- What is one of the most unusual things that one of your children did regularly when they were small?
- What was the funniest thing you can remember that one of your children said or did?
- If you had it to do all over again, would you change the way you raised your family? How?
- What did you find most difficult about raising children?
- What did you find most rewarding about being a parent?
- Did you spoil any of your children? How?
- Were you a strict or lenient parent?
- Did you find that you had to treat each of your children differently? If so, why?
- How did you first hear that you were a grandparent and how did you feel about it?

- What advice do you have for your children and grandchildren?
- As a child, what did you want to be when you grew up?
- What was your first job?
- What kinds of jobs have you had?
- How did you decide on your career?
- Did you make enough money to live comfortably?
- How long did you have to work each day at your job?
- How old were you when you retired?
- What were the hardest choices that you ever had to make? On reflection, did you make the right choices?
- Who was the person that had the most positive influence on your life? Who were they and what did they do?
- Is there a person that really changed the course of your life by something that they did? Who were they and what did they do?
- Do you remember someone saying something to you that had a big impact on how you lived your life? What was it?
- How would you describe yourself politically?
- Are you Conservative, Socialist or Liberal and why?
- What wars have been fought during your lifetime? How did you feel about them?
- If you served in the military, when and where did you serve and what were your duties?
- If you served in the military, were you ever injured in the line of duty? What were the circumstances and what were your injuries?
- As you see it, what are the biggest problems that face our nation and how do you think they could be solved?
- How tall are you?
- What color was your hair as a young child and then as an adult?
- What color are your eyes?
- Where have you lived as an adult? List the places and the years that you lived there.
- Why are you living where you are today?
- Do you wish you lived somewhere else (If so, where would it be)?
- Describe your general health.
- What major illnesses or health problems do you remember having?
- Do you have any health problems that are considered hereditary in nature? If so, what are they?
- What do you do regularly for exercise?
- Do you have any bad habits now or in the past? What were they?
- Have you ever been the victim of a crime? What happened?
- Have you ever been in a serious accident?
- Has anyone ever saved your life? Describe.
- Have you ever saved anyone else's life? Describe.
- Have you ever been hospitalized? If so, what for?
- Have you ever had surgery?
- If you could change something about yourself, what would it be ?
- Have you ever had an experience that you would consider to be super-natural or psychic ? Did you ever know something was going to happen before it actually did? What was it?
- What do you usually dream about?
- What church, if any, do you attend regularly?
- Describe your religious beliefs.
- Do you believe in an after life?
- What was the most stressful experience that you ever lived through? What helped you get through it?
- What is the scariest thing that has ever happened to you personally?
- What kinds of musical instrument(s) have you learned to play?
- Would you consider yourself creative?

- What things have you made that others have enjoyed?
- How would you describe your sense of humor?
- What is the funniest practical joke you ever played on anyone?
- What activities have you especially enjoyed as an adult?
- What are your hobbies?
- What did you like to do when you were not working?
- What is the most amazing thing that has ever happened to you?
- What is the most embarrassing thing that has ever happened to you?
- Have you ever met any famous people? Describe what happened.
- What organizations and groups have you belonged to? What about your parents?
- Have you ever won any special awards or prizes as an adult ? What were they for?
- Describe a time and place when you remember feeling truly at peace and happy to be alive. Where were you and what were you doing?
- What is the most beautiful place you have ever visited and what was it like?
- What is the longest trip that you have ever gone on? Where did you go?
- What has been your favorite vacation? Where did you go and why was it special?
- What was the favorite place you ever visited and what was it like?
- What pets have you had?
- Do you have a favorite story about a pet? What is it ?
- Is there anything you have always wanted to do, but haven't?

Favorites

- What is your favorite style of music?
- What is your favorite musical instrument?
- Who is your favorite musical group?
- What is your favorite song?
- Who is your favorite singer?
- Who is your favorite movie star?
- What is your favorite movie?
- Who is your favorite artist?
- What is your favorite painting?
- Who is your favorite poet?
- What is your favorite poem?
- What is your favorite TV program?
- Who is your favorite author?
- What is your favorite book?
- What is your favorite season?
- What is your favorite tree?
- What is your favorite flower?
- What is your favorite holiday?
- What is your favorite color?
- What is your favorite sport?
- Who is your favorite athlete?
- What is your favorite animal?
- What is your favorite meal?
- What is your favorite fruit ?
- What is your favorite vegetable?
- What is your favorite candy?
- What is your favorite biscuit?
- What is your favorite drink?

- What is your favorite restaurant?
- What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?
- What is your favorite board game?
- What is your favorite card game?

Family Descriptions

If you had to pick a label for your family members (your spouse, children, parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, aunts & uncles, cousins), who best fits the following descriptions?

- the best cook
- the hardest-worker
- the quietest
- the best memory
- the best gardener
- the funniest
- the best-looking
- the animal lover
- the most politically-active
- the most mischievous
- the calmest
- the most athletic
- the most intelligent
- the most educated
- the best career
- the most creative
- the wildest lifestyle
- the most sociable
- the biggest tease
- the best house-keeper
- the most reclusive
- the most colorful
- the most relaxed
- the most frugal
- the most generous
- the tallest
- the shortest
- the best story-teller



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of HISTORY & ART
it's about time...

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