ORAL HISTORY HANDBOOK

**A Guide to Conducting and Preserving
Oral Histories at and for JSU**

Written By

**Alissa Rae Funderburk
Oral Historian, MWC**

January 2021

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE MARGARET WALKER CENTER WHO ARE WE?

The Margaret Walker Center (MWC) is an archive and museum dedicated to the preservation, interpretation, and dissemination of African American history and culture.

Founded as the Institute for the Study of the History, Life, and Culture of Black People by Margaret Walker in 1968, the MWC honors her legacy through its archival collections, exhibits, and public programs.

Located at Jackson State University (JSU) and open to the public, the MWC houses significant records like the papers of the late Margaret Walker; those of the former U.S. Secretary of Education, Roderick Paige; and a large oral history department that includes nearly 2000 interviews. As a museum, it also offers exhibit spaces that highlight the center's collections and the history of the university.

The MWC collects living memories, archival records, and personal papers for scholarly use; advocates for landmark preservation such as the historic 1903 Ayer Hall, which as the oldest structure at JSU was named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1977; engages the community through public programming; and works with other JSU departments, including its partner the **COFO Civil Rights Education Center**.

INTRODUCTION

This handbook was designed to explain not only our methods but the guiding philosophy that informs every detail of how we do oral history at the Margaret Walker Center, from preparation and interviewing to transcription and archiving. This first edition pulls from outside institutions and individuals, including experts in the field, resources across academia, and the best practices of the Oral History Association.

With this guide, we hope to create a uniform system for the handling of oral histories at the MWC and a tool for the training of researchers new to the field. That said, this handbook is merely a guide, and all those who seek to do oral history should abide by the practices and code of ethics that best suit their given project, and the persons involved at that time.

WHAT IS ORAL HISTORY?

Oral history is a field of study and a method of gathering, preserving, and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events. Where the concepts of past and history refer to a continuous, typically chronological, record of important or public events. At the MWC we believe history is being made with the passing of each day.

In *Doing Oral History*[i], Donald Ritchie explains, "Oral History collects memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange in audio or video format. Recordings of the interview are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then placed in a library or archives. These interviews may be used for research or excerpted in a publication, radio or video documentary, museum exhibition, dramatization, or other forms of public presentation. Recordings, transcripts, catalogs, photographs, and related documentary materials can also be posted on the Internet."

ORAL HISTORY @ THE MWC

The Oral History Division's mission is to supplement written records by storing the accounts of African-American community members and cultural leaders. The Division is located on the third-floor of Ayer Hall. As of the year 2020, the oral history collections archived at the MWC include: Behind the Veil; Black Churches in Jackson During Integration; Blacks in Education in Jackson, Mississippi; The Clinton Project; Farish Street Historic District; Gold Coast; Good Old Days; Head Start; JSU Legends; Labor as an Instrument of Social Change; Mississippi Funk Music; Piney Woods Country Life School; Robert Clark Era Project; The R.O.O.T.S. of Sunflower County; and Women of Courage/Women's Issues.

THEORY

Most social sciences abide by a method of observation founded on the division of 'outsider' from 'insider'. The interdisciplinary nature of oral history focuses on co-creation. It seeks a true heteroglossia, in which the work produced contains a diversity of voices, styles of discourse, ideas, and points of view. The approach to oral history we practice at MWC is one grounded in the notions of collaboration and relationship.

The identity of every individual is created through their relation to the various significant others in their life. This is part of what makes us all so unique and what differentiates the perspectives from which we share our stories. In oral history, every interview is a singular experience that should be approached differently depending on its circumstances. As individuals in history, subject to any number of external forces throughout their lives at the time an interview occurs, both the narrator and the interviewer bring an untold number of those significant others into the room with them.

In her essay, "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly," [ii] Karen Fields describes the interview as a space for thinking, feeling, and reconsidering the past, for reacting and building context. She suggests that part of the job of interviewers during that encounter is figuring out what questions the narrator is actually answering and what they are thinking about at that moment. In order to do that job, oral historians must always be flexible. We have to adapt to the path on which the narrator wishes to take us, be able to listen deeply and ask questions like "what do you think…" or "how do you explain...," and shift time or consciousness to address possible changes in the path of their narration. We have to recognize that ours is not the only agenda in the room and respect the value of our narrator's goals as much as our own.

These principles are key to establishing a relationship with a narrator. They mark the beginnings of co-creation. While in truth, the preparations for any oral history project should involve time spent in building the relationship and setting intentions, plans can only go so far. It is in the moment of the *encounter* that an oral historian performs the act of balancing their training, position, and power with their relationship to the narrator to create an environment of shared authority. As Daniel Kerr discusses in his article, "Allan Nevins is Not My Grandfather," oral historians have been called to embrace "a concept of 'accompaniment,' where two people seeking to bridge a divide come together as they are, not pretending they are something they are not; recognize the

expertise of the other; and walk 'side by side with one another on a common journey.'" Simple things, like trying not to interrupt the narrator or steer them towards a particular memory, are the skills on which we base our technique and with which we show a desire to honor the voice of the narrator. We endeavor to be less goal-driven in the interview, and more open to the twists and turns of the narrator's story and the meaning therein.

We learn from Alessandro Portelli in *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History,* that oral history "tells us less about events than about their meaning" and that "interviews often reveal unknown events" and "cast new light on unexplored areas of the daily life of the nonhegemonic classes." While Fields says that "memory fails, leaving blanks, and memory fails by filling blanks mistakenly," Portelli would suggest that this is the success of memory, for those mistakes, when observed and interpreted in the space of an oral history, are the moments in which meaning-making can occur.

In *The Order Has Been Carried Out: History, Memory and Meaning of a Nazi Massacre in Rome,* Portelli shows us that wrong tales "allow us to recognize the interests of the tellers, and the dreams and desires beneath them." Errors, inventions, and myths lead us through and beyond facts to their meanings. As Portelli says, "no matter what their personal histories…historians and sources are hardly ever on the same 'side.' The confrontation of their different partialities—confrontation as 'conflict,' and as a 'search for unity'—is one of the things which make oral history interesting."

METHODOLOGY

To perform is to complete or fulfill an action, task or function - but also present or represent something to an audience. To perform oral history is to do both, to bring closer to completion a lacking historical record and present to the world something previously unknown or heard. The idea of oral history as a performance is a useful metaphor for the many parts and products of this type of work. Like a play or concert, oral history is the meeting point of an artist and an audience where memory is the art uniquely crafted in the experience.

Whether scripted or not, each performance is different because of the extenuating circumstances of the time, place, and people involved. Elements

like tone, volume, rhythm, speed, cadence, dialect, silence, and emotion all have the potential to shift slightly or drastically in their combination to create something new, no matter how many times a story is told or even how exact the wording might be. The way oral history lives and breathes denotes a constant sense of creation in comparison to the often-stagnant view of history, frozen in time and etched in books.

Portelli portrays an understanding of these dynamics in his work, particularly in uncovering memories of the distant past decades later. Portelli looks into stories that are told and passed on from one generation to another, examining the changes for meaning. While details are valuable, this type of historical work is less about fact and more about feeling. People do not live their lives in accordance with facts but rather with feeling, with emotion, with care, and as such that is the same approach we should have towards gathering the story of a life, with great attention to care.

The performance of oral history, the act of a narrator choosing their words, and speaking from a place of care and intent to an audience, is what we as oral historians can build from. We are actors in this play as well. We perform in the questions we ask or the silences we leave. We perform in the transcriptions we create and the editing we do. Every choice that goes into the creation of an oral history, and especially the creation of a public-facing product from an oral history, is an act of performing meant to elicit a particular kind of response. Just like with any work of art, our work is meant to prompt, to enlighten, to bring awareness, or stimulate emotion. And, as such, we must be fully cognizant of our intent, each time we perform it.

Similarly, the act of conducting an interview specifically is an encounter. As Portelli says in his essay "Oral History as Genre," oral history "...refers both to what the historians *hear* (the oral sources) and to what the historians *say* or *write*. On a more cogent plane, it refers to what the source and historian do *together* at the moment of their encounter in the interview." It seems simple and obvious, that each interview is a particular kind of meeting or experience between (at least) two people. However, the meaning of these individual meetings bears specific mention and investigation.

"Encounter" illustrates the inherent chance of an interview. That indescribable element that makes each meeting unique unto itself. No matter how many times you might interview the same narrator, on the same subject, in the same setting, each encounter is different and special. No matter how much planning and research might go into the creation of an interview setting, it is particular

and the actual moment of its creation cannot be designed. It is always subject to both chance and change.

Therein lies the beauty of the interview, it's face-to-face encounter and orality combined to create a single moment. No written document can have that same quality, that same complexity. That is the richness and complexity of co-authorship: the relationship between the narrator and oral historian that creates the moment of the story and the storytelling experience.

This is the relationship of conversation, of dialogue, of the question and answer format that makes up an interview and is the basis of oral history. It is not just speech, it is speech in answer to some known sentiment, fact, question, or even misinformation. This is what the encounter of the interview means, we are not simply the audience to another's performance, we are interacting with the other. We are in conversation and it is our job to meet them halfway, to bring ourselves to that space, to correspond, encounter them, and create something new.

PREPARATION

As stated previously, being well prepared for an interview is key, even though it is never a guarantee of success. No amount of preparation, planning, research, or pre-interviews, can ensure an interview will fulfill the agenda of a given project or meet the goals of an interviewer. Preparation, does, however, often lead to a smoother interview process and a better experience for the narrator in which they feel comfortable and empowered to be themselves as they tell their stories.

BLUEPRINTS

More involved than a project proposal, a blueprint is a plan of work for your project that outlines the necessary steps of action needed to accomplish your goal. In an oral history project, these steps usually include research, outreach, interviewing, and synthesizing the interviews into a final product of some sort. A well thought-out blueprint can be used to acquire funding for a project as well as guide the interviewers and other people brought on to execute the project. It provides context and background information and sets a standard

for the work that is to be completed. Below are some sections typically incorporated in a blueprint:

- *Introduction*
- *Statement of Purpose*
- *Background*
- *Budget*
- *Methodology*
- *Periods of Inquiry*
- *Categories of Inquiry*
- *Core Interviewees*
- *Interviewer Responsibilities*
- *Project Resources*
- *Models*
- *Points of Contact*
- *Bibliography*

LETTERS OF INVITATION

A letter of invitation is a formal means of informing a potential narrator of the project you're doing and your interest in their participation. Typically, you or another person associated with the project will have already reached out to potential narrators to gauge interest more informally. Therefore, this letter does not need to be lengthy but should clearly indicate the pertinent details. Some potential narrators may have been interviewed before and others may not have ever heard of oral history at all, so your letter should be tailored to the individual. Below is a sample that may be used as a template for writing your own.

"Dear [Narrator],

My name is [NAME] and as an oral history interviewer for the Margaret Walker Center at Jackson State University, I will be conducting a number of interviews for [PROJECT NAME]. Because of your history, we believe that you have important experiences to contribute to an oral history on this topic, and would like to officially invite you to be interviewed as a part of the project.

We think it is important that your story and those of your contemporaries be remembered and these records may prove essential to future researchers. We believe the method of oral history will be an excellent way to not only gather these voices but also preserve them.

Oral history interviews are different from most interviews on TV and the radio in several ways, most importantly the person being interviewed has more control over how the interview is structured and what it is about. This is because oral historians ask open-ended questions, giving the interviewee time and space to talk about whatever they want.

For this project, we will ask you to sign a legal release or contract of donation. However, you will have the chance to listen to your interview and review the transcript for accuracy. Oral histories are

archived in their entirety and for this project, the interviews will be kept at the Margaret Walker Center and made accessible to the public.

If you are willing, we will want to begin fairly soon. I will be conducting interviews for the project over the next [TIME PERIOD]. I would be happy to conduct the interview wherever is most convenient and/or comfortable for you (as long as the space is quiet). If you will be in Jackson and would like to be interviewed at JSU that can also be arranged.

A normal interview is done in sessions of about one and a half hours in length. We expect that more than one interview session may be needed and hope to schedule approximately [NUMBER OF SESSIONS] within the interviewing period. When all is said and done, you will get a copy of your interview to keep and parts of it may be featured on the Margaret Walker Center website.

You and I will work together to decide what to talk about in the interview. Hopefully, we can start by talking about your early life and education. Some other topics I'm interested in are: [TOPICS OF INTEREST].

I'm sure once we start talking, all kinds of other topics will come up. If you would email me at [EMAIL ADDRESS] to let me know whether you agree to be interviewed, I will be happy to discuss the project in more detail and answer any questions you might have. I look forward to talking with you soon."

SCHEDULING

A typical oral history interview session should take about 1.5-2 hours. Some projects may require more in-depth interviews and some narrators might take more time. In these cases, interviews should be scheduled in multiple sessions.

Oral history interviews should always be scheduled at the convenience of the narrator and, if possible, in their own home or office to be most comfortable for them. One of the most important things to consider when deciding on a time and location for an interview is sound quality. Is there anything in this particular space, such as a loud air conditioner, or anyone, such as young children or pets, which may interfere with the recording? Perhaps the air conditioner can be turned down or off for the duration of the interview or the interview can be scheduled while children are at school. Discuss these things with your narrator and provide alternative solutions such as an interview done on campus.

PRE-INTERVIEW

A crucial part of interview preparation involves the pre-interview, which may be an in-person or telephone conversation. This will allow the interviewer to get a sense of what subjects the narrator is capable of covering well, and it will also give the interviewer a chance to convey the substantive goals of the project. As some narrators may have previously taken part in other interviews, it is important to explain how oral history and your project, in particular, may be different from more conventional journalistic projects. Particularly in the event of interviews expected to be completed remotely, the pre-interview conversation will provide an opportunity to discuss technological needs and troubleshoot any problems ahead of the interview.

CONSENT & CONTRACT OF DONATION

Prior to conducting an interview, it is important to have a consenting narrator and a firm understanding of what your narrator is and is not comfortable with. The culmination of this negotiation is the signing of a contract of donation. The standard contract of donation for the MWC is included below for your reference:

"I do hereby convey to the Margaret Walker Center (MWC) of Jackson State University all legal title to the items and materials submitted along with this interview to become the permanent property of the Center. I certify that I am the lawful owner of the items conveyed and have full right to transfer to the Center and the University all copyright interest in the items.

It is understood that it is my purpose and intention to vest all incidents of title and absolute ownership of the items in the Center, including, without limitation, copyrights and the right to reproduce same in any form and to adapt, publish, perform, or publicly display the items.

I agree that this interview and material may be made available for research on an unrestricted basis, subject only to those restrictions which may be specified below and the established policies of the Center."

INTERVIEWING

Interviewing is the bread and butter of modern oral history work. With each passing day, we become further removed from the history that precedes us, and interviewing is the best way of capturing that history from the perspectives of those that lived it to save for future generations. Interviewing as an oral historian, however, differs greatly from that of other fields or professions because it is grounded in the act of deep listening rather than rote questions and concise answers. For this reason, oral history interviewing requires patience above all else, even preparedness.

The typical procedure for an oral history interview requires the oral historian to arrive early for equipment set-up and chit-chat. This allows time for the narrator to become more comfortable with the set-up and their interviewer. You should tell your narrator how the equipment works, that you intend to take notes, and ask before pressing record if the narrator has any questions. Because the typical oral history interview is often over an hour or two in length, the interviewer should find times to provide the narrator with short breaks. It is best to make as little unnecessary sound as possible, and instead use body language and eye contact to assure the narrator of your interest. Ultimately, the goal of interviewing should be to make sure your narrator feels heard even if that requires multiple sessions.

EQUIPMENT

Selecting the proper equipment is vital to the process of conducting an oral history interview. It impacts the quality of sound and image that is intended to be preserved forever. Whether you are using a cell phone, an audio recorder, a DSLR (digital single-lens reflex) camera, or camcorder, be sure to be fully charged, have extra batteries, and the proper cables before every interview session. If you are using microphones, particularly lavaliers, practice your placement for them and test that they are in working order before the interview as well. Headphones are also essential for checking the sound quality at your interview location prior to beginning the interview. The MWC's interview equipment includes:

- *Microphones*
- *Camcorder*
- *Headphones*
- *Tripod*

RECORDING

Though in some cases it might be impossible to do so, it is important to record the interview however you can, even if it must be simply through note-taking. Note-taking is an often-overlooked aspect of the recording part of oral history interviewing but it can prove to be especially beneficial both in the interview itself and in the maintaining of data in the archival process. Aside from note-taking, the most common forms of recording oral histories are currently video and audio. As the MWC moves forward in the digitization of its archives, we strive to digitally record all interviews with the best technology available to us and suitable to the environment.

When preparing to record an in-person oral history, one must consider the location of the interview and its access to power, noise levels, and lighting. It helps to arrive early to assess the location and set up your equipment. At the start of recording, be sure to mention the day, date time, your name and position, your narrator, and the project for which the interview is being conducted. Ask once again, for the record, if you have permission to record the interview for this purpose before beginning with your questions.

QUESTIONS AND QUIET

Asking the right questions is an important part of creating a great interview. The style of interviewing preferred by the MWC is a general life history approach, which we adapt to each particular project or narrator. A list of sample questions you can start with is below:

- *Childhood*
  - *When and where were you born and where did you grow up?*
  - *What are some of your earliest childhood memories?*
  - *Paint a picture for me of your childhood home/the neighborhood you grew up in.*
  - *Describe a place that was important to you as a child.*
- *Family*
  - *Can you tell me about your parents? Their parents?*
  - *Where is your family from?*
  - *Do you have siblings?*

- *Education*
    - *What was school like for you?*
    - *Tell me about your first day of school/first memory of going to school.*
    - *What schools did you attend?*
    - *Did you have a teacher who had a particular influence on your life?*
- *Culture, beliefs, and traditions*
    - *Are there any particular traditions that exist in your family? Community?*
    - *Was there a particular faith or belief that was taught in your family?*
    - *What holidays did your family celebrate when you were growing up?*

But having a good list of questions is not enough to conduct a good interview. An oral historian's most important task is to listen, to be able to sit in their own silence to make room for the voice of the narrator. Quiet can be as useful a tool as questions in getting a narrator to share their story. When a story is in progress, a good oral history interviewer should follow the lead of their narrator over the order of their questions. The questions prepared for an interview should be used as a guide and helping aid when the conversation stalls or lags, but the goal is to put the narrator at ease so that they are comfortable sharing their life in their own words.

TRANSCRIPTION

The role of a transcript is to represent what the narrator intended to say, as clearly as possible, in text. This handbook places literary content and spirit of speech at the center of all summary, indexing, and transcription work. When possible, some of the qualities of the spoken word can be translated to text through syntax and punctuation. However, we do not transcribe speech phonetically. Future readers seeking specific aural details from the interview are encouraged to reference the actual interview recordings. The characteristics of how individual narrators speak—in terms of syntax, grammar, and diction—are welcome in the transcript insofar as they do not interfere with the clarity of what they mean to communicate.

SUMMARIZING

Interviewers should complete narrative summaries after each interview session. This summary does not have to be long but should include obscure terms or difficult-to-spell proper names that may pose challenges during any future transcription. More importantly, these summaries should include an analytical section on what has been learned and that identifies relevant connections to other interview sessions in the project.

INDEXING

An interview index can be as simple or detailed as you would like but should include a timestamp of each question asked or major subject discussed. Indexing goes a long way towards providing the necessary metadata to make your interview more searchable on the internet. According to Elinor A. Mazé metadata "consists of all of the sets of terms used in the curating processes and all of the lexical and semantic systems by which these records are kept in a readily useable form with widely understood words and symbols."

TRANSCRIBING

The Margaret Walker Center will aim to produce a verbatim transcript (reflecting all the words and sounds as they are on the recording) while remaining easy to read and preserving the narrator's tone and spirit. It should be as accurate a reflection of the recording as possible and involves two main parts: the initial creation of the transcript and metadata, and the editing process.

Step 1. In-processing. Audio recordings at the Center are carefully processed and tracked from initial receipt to permanent accession into the archives. Every interview recording must have an interviewee agreement signed by the narrator permitting the Center to process, archive, disseminate, and make use of the interview for educational purposes. Interview recordings will be uploaded to the server and labeled with the narrator's name, interviewer's name, date of the interview, and project name. A tracking sheet will serve to document the status of the interview throughout the process of transcription, editing, and online dissemination, and to note any restrictions placed on the interview. After an MP3 (and/or M4A, WAV, etc) copy is saved on the server, the interview will be ready for transcription. A correspondence file folder will be made for each project and each narrator within a project and will be categorized as "active" until the finished transcript is deposited in Archives.

The interviewee agreement, biography sheet, recording log, word list, and any other collateral materials received from the interviewer/depositor will be kept in the correspondence folder and given to the transcriptionist to refer to during transcription. Interview information will then be entered into the CONTENTdm database.

Step 2. Transcription. An initial first draft of a transcript will be made in Microsoft Word from the original recording or the original transcripts when recordings are not available. Accuracy in creating the first draft of a transcript is important to the final edited outcome, but in instances when speech is deemed unintelligible, the transcriptionist may use the word "unclear" in brackets. Using a dictionary, The Chicago Manual of Style, online resources, and any word list, recording log, or datasheet provided by the interviewer, the transcriptionist's research and accuracy in the first draft stage will ease and speed each succeeding step. Transcriptionists should refer to the CCOHR Oral History Transcription Style Guide, for specific questions on things like abbreviations, acronyms, brackets, capitalization, commas, em-dashes, numbers quotations marks, and the like. There is some variability in transcription time depending on the speed of conversation, audio clarity, microphone placement, and familiarity with dialect and content. During transcription, established spellings of additional words and names should be added to the word list for future reference. The first draft transcript will be typed double spaced for the narrator, when still living, to make corrections or insert additional information to be bracketed later in the editing process. Timestamps are inserted in the transcript every few minutes (at least once per page), or each time a new topic is introduced. Upon completion of the first draft, the transcriptionist will proofread for words the spell-checker may have missed, proper formatting, and consistency in style throughout the transcript before turning it over to the audit editor. The transcript will be saved on the servers.

EDITING

Editing is a term that can refer to both the process of editing an interview's transcript and the process of editing the audio of an interview. As part of the making of a transcript, the process of editing requires four separate steps.

Step 1. Audit editing. The audit editor simultaneously will listen to the recording while proofreading the transcript and correcting errors in spoken word, spelling, punctuation, and formatting, and filling in any recognizable portions of dialogue deemed unclear by the transcriptionist. Converting speech

to written language requires careful, thoughtful proofreading with consideration of the subject and historical context. The audit editor will ensure that all words in the transcript were on the recording, that none were misunderstood or mistyped, and that they are in the order spoken. Punctuation will be checked to ensure it conveys the speaker's intended meaning. Upon completion, the transcript will be saved on the server as an "AE draft" and printed for mailing to the narrator when possible. Finally, the date of audit editing will be noted on the tracking sheet and database.

Step 2. Review by the narrator. The audit edited draft of the transcript will be mailed (or emailed) to the narrator when possible with a copy of the audio recording for them to keep and listen to while reading the transcript for any needed correction. A letter of instruction, guidelines for review, and a postage-paid envelope for ease of return will be included with the transcript. The narrator will be given four weeks to return any corrections before the transcript advances to the final editing stage. Additional review time will be provided upon request. The date of mailing and expected receipt will be noted on the tracking sheet and database. In cases where the narrator is deceased or incapacitated, this review will not be possible but annotations by family members may be permitted when deemed appropriate or necessary

Step 3. Corrections entered. If corrections are received from a narrator, the date the transcript is received will be noted on the tracking sheet and in the database. Corrections will then be entered, and the transcript will be saved on the server as a "transcript." Corrections entered may be spelling corrections, and unintelligible words may be filled in. Any additional information not on the recording but provided for clarification purposes will be bracketed. The returned, corrected transcript will be preserved and archived with the final transcript.

Step 4. Final edit. In the final edit, the transcript will be changed to single line spacing, and the Margaret Walker Center's Oral Historian will proof for proper formatting and page numbering before composing and adding a table of contents, brief biography, and copyright and title pages. Any appendix material will be added at this time such as copies of photographs, documents, and news clippings. The Oral Historian will assign a volume number to the interview, renaming and saving the transcript on the server according to volume number, and will complete the tracking sheet, adding pertinent tracking sheet and biographical/demographic data to the database. The final Word transcript will be saved in PDF format. Duplicate copies of the final transcript will be deposited in the Center's archives. Duplicate transcript copies on regular paper will be

mailed to the narrator (or their family) when possible, and one copy will be kept for the Center's collection. A duplicate copy of the interviewee agreement will be kept in the correspondence folder, and the folder will then be filed as "retired."

AUDIO EDITING

This handbook will not go deeply into the practice of editing the audio of interviews as it can be a highly technical process and is not often done to interviews intended for the archives. There are, however, times when some editing is requested by the narrator for the sake of clarity or to protect their privacy. In such cases, parts of the audio can be trimmed out and the transcripts redacted to signify the missing piece of the conversation, prior to being archived.

ARCHIVING

The goal of archiving oral histories at the MWC is to provide permanent access for future generations and communities, not just those in academia. Our archives and the 17 existing oral history collections are open to the public, including students, researchers, and hobbyists from all fields and walks of life. The MWC has been in the long process of digitizing the existing parts of the collection that are on reel-to-reel and cassette tapes to make them more accessible to researchers from all over the world. Much of this work was done in 2018-2019, and, in August 2019, with the help of the Smithsonian.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. *Columbia University Center for Oral History Research (CCOHR) Oral History Transcription Style Guide* *https://www.ccohr.incite.columbia.edu/blog/2018/1/17-transcription-style-guide*

2. *Oral History in the Digital Age by Doug Boyd* *http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/*

3. *Oral History Association* *https://www.oralhistory.org/*

APPENDIX

INDEXING FORM

Margaret Walker Center Oral History Indexing Form   Date

Name

Title	
Accession Number	
Narrator	
Interviewer	
Interview Date	
Collection Name	

Timestamp	Summary	Keywords
0:00:00.00	Introduction:	

TRANSCRIPTION CHECKLIST

MARGARET
WALKER
CENTER

Oral History Division
Transcription Process Checklist

In-processing.
- ☐ Check for interview agreement
- ☐ Record names of narrator and interviewer, interview date, and project name on tracking form
- ☐ Create correspondence file folder
- ☐ Create biography sheet, recording log, and word list for correspondence file folder

Transcription.
- ☐ Begin first draft of transcription in Microsoft Word (inch margins and double spacing)
- ☐ Save transcript as draft (e.g. luckett_btv_draft.docx)
- ☐ Note date of transcript and name of transcriber on tracking form
- ☐ Add to biography and word list as appropriate
- ☐ Insert time stamp every few minutes or with each new topic
- ☐ Proofread and save draft
- ☐ Print draft of transcript for the correspondence file folder

Audit editing.
- ☐ Proofread transcript while listening to the recording
- ☐ Correct grammatical errors without changing the spoken words
- ☐ Insert unintelligible words when possible
- ☐ Save AE draft of transcript
- ☐ Note date of editing and name of editor on the tracking form

Narrator Review (when possible).
- ☐ Mail/Email transcript and audio to narrator for corrections (with return postage)
- ☐ Note the date of the mailing on the tracking form

Corrections entered (when possible).
- ☐ Note the date corrections are received from narrator on the tracking form
- ☐ Enter corrections
- ☐ Bracket additional information from narrator that is not a verbatim part of recording
- ☐ Save the transcript as a manuscript (e.g. luckett_btv_manuscript.docx)
- ☐ Print the transcript for the correspondence file folder

Final edit.
- ☐ Submit the transcript and audio to the MWC oral historian for editing
- ☐ Oral historian will proof for proper formatting and page numbering
- ☐ Oral historian will add a table of contents, biography, and copyright and title pages
- ☐ Add appendix material such as copies of photographs, documents, and news clippings
- ☐ Oral Historian assigns volume number to interview, renaming and saving the transcript
- ☐ Oral historian will complete the tracking sheet
- ☐ Save the final transcript as a PDF according to volume number
- ☐ Print final transcript for the correspondence file folder to be saved in oral history vault
- ☐ Mail/Email copy of final transcript to narrator
- ☐ Retire correspondence file folder to the oral history vault

BIBLIOGRAPHY

[i] Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History*. Oxford University Press, 2015.

[ii] Fields, Karen. "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly." Memory and History: Essays on Recalling and Interpreting Experience, by Jaclyn Jeffrey and Paul Thompson, Univ. Press of America U.a., 1994, pp. 89–106.

Borland, Katherine. "That's Not What I Said: A Reprise 25 Years On." Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practices of Oral History in the Twenty-First Century, by Stacey Zembrzycki et al., Routledge, 2018, pp. 31–37.
Borland, Katherine. "'That's Not What I Said': Interpretative Conflict in Oral History Narrative Research ." The Oral History Reader, by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, Routledge, 2016, pp. 310–321.
Boulanger, Ghislaine. "The Continuing and Unfinished Present: Psychoanalysis and Oral History." Listening on the Edge Oral History in the Aftermath of Crisis, by Mark Cave and Stephen M. Sloan, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 110–128.
Douglas, Kelly Brown. Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God. Orbis, 2015.
Hackett, Claire, and Bill Rolston. "The Burden of Memory: Victims, Storytelling and Resistance in Northern Ireland." Memory Studies, vol. 2, no. 3, 2009, pp. 355–376., doi:10.1177/1750698008337560.
Hurston, Zora Neale. Barracoon: The Story of the Last "Black Cargo". Harper Collins UK, 2018.
Mazé, Elinor A. "Metadata: Best Practices for Oral History Access and Preservation," in Oral History in the Digital Age, edited by Doug Boyd, Steve Cohen, Brad Rakerd, and Dean Rehberger. Washington, D.C.: Institute of Museum and Library Services, 2012, http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/06/metadata/
Portelli, Alessandro. The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History. State University of New York Press, 1991.
Sheftel, A., and S. Zembrzycki. "Only Human: A Reflection on the Ethical and Methodological Challenges of Working with 'Difficult' Stories." Oral History Review, vol. 37, no. 2, 2010, pp. 191–214., doi:10.1093/ohr/ohq050.