

Nash County Cultural Center

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Field-Worker's Manual
for
Story-Gatherers

Mary Lewis Deans
Project Chairman

NASH COUNTY CULTURAL CENTER

Oral History Project

The mission of this project is to facilitate the citizens of Nash County in recording their joys, their sorrows, their beliefs, and their humor, in their own words.

The oral history taker is responsible for the faithful recording of the stories of his neighbors and friends, not for their veracity or historical accuracy. For this project, the oral history taker does not profess to be a historian, a folklorist, or a scholar. The oral history taker is serving as scribe.

The stories will be transcribed; and the tapes, transcriptions, releases, and accompanying genealogical information will be archived at Braswell Memorial Library and other institutions as requested. Copies of the transcriptions will be made available to scholars through the library catalog.

The Nash County Cultural Center has budgeted funds for this project. The budget covers cost of tapes and duplicate tapes, reproduction of basic paperwork, and mailing expenses. The budget does not cover the cost of transcription (currently valued at \$60 per hour of tape) or for travel or for the hours of work accomplished by oral history takers. These are very real expenses to an oral history project. It is important that each volunteer keep a record of time donated, of travel donated, and of other incidentals. These valuable donations will be recorded as in-kind gifts and used in accounting for the true cost of the project.

This is a scholarly pursuit, and thorough paperwork is essential to the long term value of the labor of the project. There is also urgency to the project. The obituaries in the daily papers are testimony to this urgency. Oral history takers are urged to go forward with devotion to detail and with appreciation for the significance of the work they are doing and the value of their gift to future generations.

The Art of Gathering Stories

Gathering stories is an art. A skilled interviewer creates an atmosphere in which the storyteller feels that he and the interviewer are swapping tales. Usually, the interviewer has to tell a little of his own story to "prime the pump." The trick is for the interviewer to stop talking once the interviewee begins. The history-taker must suppress the inclination to say "Uh-huh" or "Oh, Is that so?" or to laugh aloud. Transcribing a tape with more than one voice on it is nearly impossible. There's no prohibition against having the voice of the story-gatherer on the tape. The problem comes when two people are speaking at the same time.

The requirement that the story-gatherer remain silent creates a problem of its own. It deprives the speaker of the support and the energy one receives from an actively engaged listener, an "amen corner." This can be alleviated to some degree by an interviewer whose body language and facial expression communicate involvement in and appreciation of the story.

It is hoped that this oral history project will create a magnificent collection of STORIES. Some people are natural storytellers. Others aren't. If a story-gatherer is fortunate enough to encounter an enthusiastic, talented, natural storyteller, the appropriate response is to turn on the tape recorder, and let it flow. It's the purpose of this project to record Nash County as it sees and remembers itself. There is no hallowed topic which must be included or forbidden topic which must be avoided.

Not everyone is a gifted storyteller. Not everyone is comfortable with a tape recorder. Provided on the next page is a list of questions which may be useful in stimulating a history-giver. It is recommended that the interviewer familiarize himself with these questions, then leave the list at home. Ask those questions which may spark interest with any given interviewer. Use the questions judiciously. Remember, it's a story-gathering session, not a question and answer session.

After the Interview

Immediately, label the tape with the full name of the interviewee and date of the interview.

Dubbing the Tape

Dub the tape twice. If you have dubbing equipment, you may do it yourself. If you lack the equipment, contact the project chairman, who will get the dubbing done for you. The original tape will not be used again except for archival duplication. One copy of the tape will be sent to the Interviewee. One copy will be used for transcription work.

Field Notes

On the day of the interview, while the event is still fresh in the mind of the interviewer, it is critical to complete the form, Field Notes. This is not a writing exercise. A few words will do. If circumstances were truly remarkable, please say as much as necessary.

Guidelines for Transcription

According to Edward D. Ives, author of The Tape-Recorded Interview: A Manual in Folklore and Oral History, and recognized authority on the subject, faithful transcription is not necessarily verbatim. It is permissible to omit the stutterings, ahhhhs, and self-corrections of the interviewee when these utterances aren't significant to the story. It is not permissible, in transcription, to change words or alter grammar. A pause in speech should be indicated by use of three periods. More than three indicate that words have been omitted. If a story is selected for publication, it will be edited for clarity and conciseness. Barring death or incapacity, every teller will have the opportunity to endorse or reject his/her edited story.

Transcribing interviews is very time-consuming. Some interviews may be indexed rather than transcribed.

NCCC Oral History Project

Record of Donation

Date	Hours	Miles	Expense	Activity or Item

Name and telephone number of volunteer _____

Field Notes

Date _____

Name and Description of Interviewee:

Description of Setting:

Other Noteworthy Details:

Date: _____

NCCC Oral History Project

Date _____

Interviewee Information

Name _____

Address _____

Telephone # _____

Birth Date _____

Birth Place _____

Genealogical Information

Father of Interviewee:

Name: _____

Birth Date _____

Birth Place _____

Death Date _____

Death Place _____

Mother of Interviewee

Name: _____

Birth Date _____

Birth Place _____

Death Date _____

Death Place _____

RELEASE

NASH COUNTY CULTURAL CENTER

100 East Washington Street
P. O. Box 701
Nashville, N. C. 27856

Thank you for participating in the Nash County Cultural Center's Oral History Project. By signing below you give your permission to include any tapes and/or photographs made during the Oral History Project in public archives where they will be available to researchers and the public for scholarly and educational purposes including publications and exhibitions. By giving your permission, you do not give up any copyright or performance rights that you may hold.

I agree to the uses of these materials as described above.

(Signature) _____

(Date) _____

(Researcher's Signature) _____