NOAC 2024

CU Boulder

SEEK NEW HEIGHTS

Oral History Project

Capture Your Lodge’s Past

Scouting Memories Project

- Joint effort between National Scouting Museum, BSA Alumni, and Order of the Arrow.
- Collecting memories and memorabilia from 100 million Scouting alumni and friends.
- Visit us online at: https://scoutingmemories.org/

Learning Objectives

1. Understand what “oral history” means and why it is important.

2. Develop practical knowledge on how to conduct an effective oral history interview.

3. Develop practical knowledge on essential tech and equipment for oral history.

1.

What is Oral History?

What is Oral History?

Oral history is a method of gathering, preserving and interpreting the voices and memories of people, communities, and participants in past events.

– The Oral History Foundation

https://oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/

Why is oral history important?

- It helps round out the story of the past.
- It helps us understand how individuals and communities experienced the forces of history.
- It preserves a sound portrait of who we are in the present and what we remember about the past.

Ref: https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/66420.pdf

Order of the Arrow Obligation

I do hereby promise on my honor as a Scout, that I will always and faithfully observe and preserve the traditions of the Order of the Arrow, Wimachtendienk, Wingolauchsik, Witahemui.

I will always regard the ties of Brotherhood in the Order of the Arrow as lasting, and will seek to preserve a cheerful spirit, even in the midst of irksome tasks and weighty responsibilities, and will endeavor, so far as in my power lies, to be unselfish in service and devotion to the welfare of others.

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2.

Getting Started

Getting Started

- Identify a topic you are interested in.
- Find people who can help you explore that topic.
- Talk to those people!

Identify a Topic of Interest

- What topic(s) will your project focus on?
  - Your troop, your chapter, your lodge, or your council.
  - Your local council camp.
  - A specific ceremony team, drum team, or dance team.
  - Your lodge's trip to the 2024 NOAC!

- Pro Tip: Keep it simple! Don't be afraid to "niche down" to a very specific topic for your first project.

Identify People Related to Your Topic

- Some of these people will be obvious. For example, if you are capturing your lodge's history, you will obviously want to talk to current and former lodge chiefs and lodge advisers.
- Others will be less obvious. Look for people who might try to hide behind the scenes.
- Ask your interviews for recommendations!
  - "Is there anyone else who you think I should talk to?"
  - "What should I ask them about?"

Example: Lodge History Interviews

- Current and Past Leadership:
  - Lodge Chief, Vice-Chiefs, Chapter Chiefs
  - Lodge Adviser, Staff Adviser, Chapter Advisers
- Award Recipients:
  - Vigil Honor, Founder's Award
  - Distinguished Service Award
  - Order of the Arrow Centurion Award
- Other Groups:
  - Drum, dance, and ceremony teams? Cook Crew? Elangomats?
  - Don't forget to talk to your patch collectors!
  - What are some other noteworthy groups?

"When you become part of something, in some way you count."

-Studs Terkel

Contact Your Interview Candidates

- Introduce yourself and your project.
- Explain why you're interested in their story.
- Ask them if they are interested in being interviewed.
- This can be done in-person, over the phone, or via email.

"Hi, my name is Chris Brightwell and I'm doing a project on the history of Coosa Lodge. As part of that project, I've been interviewing all of the past lodge chiefs and lodge advisers. Would you be interested in doing an interview for this project?"

Pre-Interview Meetings

- When possible, do a “pre-interview” meeting. (10-15 min!)
  - What topics will you cover? Who will be in the room?
  - Where and when will you do the the interview?
  - Are there any photos or other artifacts that help tell their story?
  - If you’re recording this remotely, do a quick technical test.
- This is best done in-person or over the phone.
- This is also a great time to give the interviewee a copy of your consent forms, a link to some example interviews, and anything else that might help prepare them OR ease their anxiety.
  - Do NOT give them a copy of your questions!

Ethical Considerations

- Permission
  - You MUST have a permission form or rights agreement.
  - This allows interviewee to determine what happens once they are done.
- Transcription
  - Accessibility is important! Transcripts make interviews more accessible.
  - Transcripts are also searchable!
  - Interviewee should review and approve the recording AND the transcript.
- Emotion
  - Be sensitive to emotions, expected or otherwise.

Review: Getting Started

- Identify a topic you are interested in.
- Find people who can help you explore that topic.
- Contact those people.
- Have a brief pre-interview meeting.
- Be mindful of ethical considerations.

3.

5 Rules for Great Interviews

5 Rules for Great Interviews

1. Do your research.
2. Be courteous.
3. Be *genuinely* curious.
4. Use active listening.
5. Ask open-ended questions.

"It's more of a conversation than an interview."

-Studs Terkel

Rule #1: Do your research.

- Develop a basic biographical sketch of your interviewee.
  - Where did they grow up? When did they join Scouting?
  - What do they do outside of Scouting?
  - A lot of clues can come from your pre-interview meeting.
- Look for previous works:
  - If possible, listen to other interviews with them.
  - If they wrote a book, read it!
  - If they designed a bunch of patches, bring them with you!
  - If they helped build a camp, visit it! (Maybe do the interview there!)

Rule #2: Be courteous.

- Consider having some drinks and snacks on-hand.
- Make sure the seating arrangement is comfortable.
  - Is the room too hot? Too cold?
  - Is there blinding sunlight from a nearby window?
  - Are they allergic to pets or any other environmental effects?
- Don’t interrupt the interviewee during an answer.
- Try to not correct them, even if you know they are wrong.
  - This is often considered a hostile action during an interview.
  - It can cause them to “clam up” for the rest of the interview.
- Early is on-time, on-time is late, and late is unacceptable.

Rule #3: Be genuinely curious.

- People are smart. They can tell when you're not really interested. They can tell when you're faking it.
- If you are interested in someone's story, they will often be more excited to dive deep and share many details.
- If they think you are bored or disinterested, they will be looking for the nearest exit.

"I don't have to stay curious. I *am* curious, about all of it, all the time."

-Studs Terkel

Rule #4: Use active listening.

- This is part of NLS, DYLC, NYLT, and Wood Badge.
- Your interviewee should feel like you are fully engaged.
  - Make good eye contact.
  - Be mindful of your body language.
- Give positive, affirmative feedback, but do it QUIETLY.
  - Use physical gestures, such as nodding your head.
  - Do NOT use verbal responses. They interfere with your recording!

Rule #5: Ask open-ended questions.

- A question that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no” will usually be answered the way.
  - Bad: “Did you have fun at NOAC?”
  - Good: “What was your favorite part of NOAC?”

- A good question will often lead to another question. Listen for common openings to follow-up questions:
  - Tell me more about that class.
  - Why was that your favorite patch?
  - What made that class so interesting?

Bonus Rules!

- Don’t be afraid to throw your questions out the window.
- Don’t forget to have fun.
- Don’t forget to hit the “RECORD” button.

Review: 5 Rules for Great Interviews

1. Do your research.
2. Be courteous.
3. Be genuinely curious.
4. Use active listening.
5. Ask open-ended questions.
6. Don’t forget to have fun and hit “RECORD”!

“It isn’t an inquisition; it’s an exploration, usually an exploration into the past.”

-Studs Terkel

They've got to believe you're interested. If it's a writer of a book, you've got to have read his book thoroughly. Or a person who is just an anonymous person—say for one of my books, say this guy is a carpenter—I'll ask him about his life and as he's talking I'm *listening*. I don't have written questions. It's a conversation, not an interview. "And then what did you do?" No! "Just tell me about…"—and you start, sort of like you're having a cup of coffee or a drink, so it's informal and very easy. Out of that things are revealed.

– Studs Terkel

Examples via Podcasts

1. "Silver on the Sage" – A podcast about the people and the stories at Philmont Scout Ranch.
2. "NAMM Oral History Project" – A collection of 3,000+ interviews covering every corner of the music industry.
3. "Fresh Air" with Terry Gross (NPR/Podcast)
4. "Bullseye" with Jesse Thorn (NPR/Podcast)
5. "Dolly Parton's America" (WNYC/Podcast)

4.

Tech & Equipment

Tech & Equipment

- SPOILER: Gear doesn't really matter.
  - Great microphones can't hide bad questions.

- General Wisdom:
  - Use the best mic you can. (Check your pocket!)
  - Get it as close as possible.
  - Eliminate distractions.
  - Ask great questions.
  - Monitor your recordings when possible.

Oral History in Action:

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Tech & Equipment – Addendum

- Gear doesn't matter … until it does.

- Different microphones are sometimes better suited for different uses.
  - Dynamic vs Condenser
  - Cardioid vs Omnidirectional
  - Wired vs Wireless
  - Handheld vs Lav vs Overhead Boom

- Some types of recorders can also be better suited for different needs:
  - Stereo vs Multitrack
  - 16-bit vs 24-bit vs 32-bit float
  - Wired and/or Bluetooth Phone Interfaces

Tech & Equipment – Remote Interviews

- Careful consideration must be given for remote interviews.
- You want to record the best possible audio, but do not want to overwhelm your interviewee with a lot of technical details.
  - Encourage them to wear headphones when possible. This will help eliminate feedback from their speakers bleeding into their microphones.
  - Encourage them to avoid large rooms when possible. This helps eliminate reverb and other acoustic effects.
  - Encourage them to use an external microphone when possible. Many laptops have built-in microphones, but most of them are really bad.
  - Encourage them to avoid Bluetooth headsets when possible. You will generally get better results and less interference from wired headsets.

Review: Tech & Equipment

- Gear doesn't really matter … until it does.
  - The more you can control the environment, the less you will need specialized equipment!

- General Wisdom:
  - Use the best mic you can. (Check your pocket!)
  - Get it as close as possible.
  - Eliminate distractions.
  - Ask great questions.
  - Monitor your recordings when possible.

5.

File Storage & Data Integrity

File Storage & Data Integrity

- "File Storage" describes the way that we organize the files and digital artifacts that we collect during our oral history projects.
  - "A place for everything and everything in its place."

- "Data Integrity" describes the way that we ensure those files will never be lost.
  - All storage discs and drives WILL eventually fail.
  - We MUST be prepared for the inevitable.
  - This is one of our key responsibilities as historians.

File Storage

- Store your files in a folder structure that is easy to understand, easy to navigate, and easy to expand.
  - Try to keep all of the files for a single interview in one place.
  - Ex: “2024 > 07 > 31 > Johnny Arrowman> [FILES]”

- File names should include the name of the interviewee, the name of the project, and the date of the interview.
  - Ex: “2024-07-31 - 2024 NOAC - Johnny Arrowman.wav”

- BONUS TIP: Keep a main spreadsheet with all of the relevant “metadata” in once place for quick and easy reference.

File Storage

- What types of files should you include?
  - Audio File(s)
  - Video Files(s)
  - Transcripts
  - Consent & Release Forms
  - Supporting photos, documents, etc.

Data Integrity

- Be sure to backup your files!

- Use the “3-2-1 Rule” for data backups.
  - 3 copies of your data,
  - on 2 different devices,
  - with 1 copy stored off-site.

- All of your Scouting-related interviews can be submitted and stored at the Scouting Memories Project!

Review: File Storage & Data Integrity

- Store all of your digital files in a clear and organized way.
  - Consider a spreadsheet for all the “metadata.”
- Keep your backups safe!
  - Remember the “3-2-1 Rule” for backups!
- Consider submitting your interviews to a larger archive.

6.

Summary

Summary

- Find a topic that interests you.
- Find people that can help you explore that topic.
- Talk to them!
- Don’t worry about equipment (unless you need to).
- Be sure to organize your data files and keep them safe.

Takeaway Challenge

Record a brief interview with your contingent's youngest and oldest members, your lodge chief, your lodge adviser, and one other person.