

SHARING OUR STORIES

Oral History Recording Guidelines



prepared for Hidden Histories Society Yukon

by Helene Dobrowolsky

Midnight Arts

with Tim Kinvig

Tim Kinvig Media Services

May 2017

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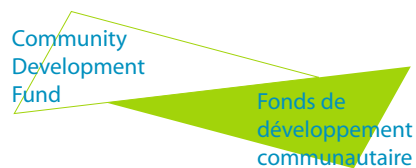
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**Hidden Histories
Society Yukon**



**La société des histoires
inconnues du Yukon**

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Cover photo: Archdeacon Joshua Philpotts, recalling his experiences as an Anglican minister in Watson Lake in the 1960s, at a Black History month event in Whitehorse, Yukon, February 2015.

Paul Gowdie photo

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the early 1990s, I prepared a couple of oral history how-to booklets for the MacBride Museum Society and the Yukon Government's Aboriginal Language Services. The latter especially proved to be a useful resource for a variety of groups from First Nations to college students to community groups researching their own history. It was widely circulated and reproduced many times. Twenty-five years later, while many of the basics of planning and carrying out an oral history project remain the same, the guide is outdated in a few fundamental ways. Tape recorders and cassettes have long since been replaced by digital recorders; the internet was not then in common use; and ideas about intellectual ownership and copyright have changed.

After hosting a weekend oral history workshop in 2015, the board of the Hidden Histories Society Yukon (HHSY) agreed that an updated booklet was overdue and undertook to make it happen. Many thanks to HHSY board members for their stellar work in preparing funding applications, overseeing work plans and schedules, and reviewing this booklet at various stages. Special thanks are due to Lillian Nakamura Maguire who took the lead on this project, as well as Charlotte Hrenchuk and Linda Johnson.

Sue Parsons, the Collections Manager from the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department, provided sample forms and some photos as well as insights into the responsibility of being the custodian of the First Nations' oral history recordings. Linda Johnson provided a sample release form that she has been using for a recent project. Paul Gowdie shared some of his photographs from the HHSY workshop. Pam Buckway and Yvonne Chan, both former CBC personnel, kindly posed for Tim Kinvig's photographs demonstrating various microphone set-ups. Susan Mooney and Sally Robinson, both experienced oral history researchers, provided useful tips.

As always, the Yukon Archives staff was extremely helpful, particularly Lesley Buchan and Donna Darbyshire. Peggy D'Orsay, a former board member and the recently-retired Yukon Archives librarian, put me touch with more current oral history sources. Joyce Bächli, the proprietor of Mega Reporting Inc., gave me valuable tips about making transcriptions. Tim Kinvig, a former CBC technician, has long been my go-to person for all things to do with sound recording. He prepared the digital recording portion of this booklet. My partner Rob Ingram handled design and layout.

Finally, sincere thanks to the Government of Yukon's Community Development Fund for funding support of this project. In the Yukon and elsewhere, oral history research continues to be an excellent way to make connections between generations as well as to enliven and enlighten our perceptions of the past.

Helene Dobrowolsky

May 22, 2017

1. INTRODUCTION

Oral Tradition refers to the ongoing process of sharing stories, songs, genealogies, histories and personal experience narratives by word of mouth. This information is preserved by repeated tellings from one generation to the next.

There are many definitions of **Oral History**, but it is most commonly understood as the process of saving these spoken memories by a sound recording. The person doing the recording is often called the **interviewer, researcher, recorder** or **oral historian**. The person being interviewed is variously referred to as the **interviewee, subject** or **informant**. An oral history project can be as simple as doing a half hour interview as part of a student project or as extensive as interviewing many different people in a variety of locations about their experiences living and working along the Alaska Highway.

Recorded memories can be shared with others in a variety of ways from publications to excerpts on social media. The important thing is to continue sharing the stories. Making a recording, which is then stored away and forgotten, is much less effective than a grandmother telling stories to her daughter who in turn shares them with her children. By their stories, our elders and seniors are not just telling us about bygone days but also giving us advice and messages that speak directly to how we can best live today.

The successful oral historian enables the informant to share their knowledge with a wider audience. This happens when both understand who the audience is — be they seniors or schoolchildren — then present the stories in an appropriate way. Good oral history researchers are also aware that their own biases and background may influence what they hear and how they understand. You might be requesting certain types of information but always be prepared to listen to what the interviewees choose to tell you because they have usually a broader sense of the meanings and purposes of their stories.

These guidelines are not just for those planning an oral history project but can also be used to assist others doing oral history work or to help evaluate previous oral history research. Keep in mind that there's no one ideal way to do oral history. Your project and interviews should respect the culture, opinions and needs of the subjects, the researchers and intended audiences. Following some basic guidelines will lead to better quality recordings and more accessible information.



Elder Louie Smith being video-recorded by Dennis Allen and Jason Shorty while overlooking Taa'an Män (Lake Laberge), where many of his relatives travelled in bygone days, November 7, 2015. *Linda Johnson photo*

2. PLANNING AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

All oral history research — whether it is learning about the early days of an immigrant community, or sitting down with your grandfather to learn more about family history — will benefit from advance planning and organization.

Before you begin, take a little time to think about the following issues.

- Why are you doing this?
- Who is your audience?
- What will the product be?
- What do you need to carry out this work?
- How can you best preserve and present the recorded material.

Types of oral history interviews and purposes:

Some oral historians have classified oral history interviews according to the types of information being requested. Usually most interviews fall into a combination of types. Being aware of these categories can help you focus on what kind of information you are seeking.

Even if this is only for a school assignment, you need to ensure that your interviewee fully understands why you are doing this, and receives copies of any products of your work (outline, transcript and copy of sound recording).

Autobiographical Interview – For this, the subject is telling the story of their life. The interviewer can make this more meaningful by asking questions that organize their story into blocks of time or themes such as early childhood, education, work history, immigration experiences, how life is different for your grandchildren, and so on.

Supplementary Interview – This type of interview is meant to provide additional information about a well-documented period or event, such as the building of the Alaska Highway, often adding interesting insights and viewpoints to the “official record”.

Topical Interview – The interview focuses on a single event or set of related themes. This might be talking about an event (the fire that burned two sternwheelers on the Whitehorse waterfront), an institution (the beginnings and activities of the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre), or a social theme such as changes in childhood education.

Process Interview – This type of interview looks at changes to a person, place, industry or institution over time. An example might be interviewing a member of one of the Syrian families moving to Whitehorse soon after their arrival, then talking to them again some months or years later about their experiences settling in.

Unstructured Narrative – This is an open-ended interview allowing the subject to discuss whatever interests him or her with a minimum of questions to guide the interview.

2.1 What is your goal in doing this oral history recording?

How will it be used? Even if it is just you talking to your grandmother, recognize that she is entrusting you with her wisdom and experiences. It is up to you to ensure this information is preserved and available to other family members and perhaps even a wider group. How will you preserve and share your recording?

2.2 Who is your audience?

Who might be interested in your recorded interview and transcript? Listeners and readers might include family members, researchers and historians, and often the general public. Keep your audience in mind when considering your final product and how to make the interview available to a wider group.

2.3 What will the product or products be?

See Section 3: **THE PRODUCT** on page 6.

2.4 What resources do you have, what do you still need?

Assess what you might need to do the project: people, equipment, setting or interview space, money and time.

PEOPLE

- Are there people who have the information you are seeking?
- Do you need a liaison person in the community or a family member to help make contact with potential interviewees?
- How many people might be interviewed?
- Depending on the size of the project, you might want to put together a team to handle different jobs. These could include planning, interviewing, record-keeping, research, transcribing, etc. Depending upon their aptitude and interests, different people could tackle different tasks.

EQUIPMENT

- Recording equipment might be purchased or borrowed. Seek good advice regarding the best current equipment and usage. Consider approaching groups that regularly do recording such as local broadcasters or do online research at places such as reputable oral history sites.
- When you are determining equipment needs, think also about what you might need for outlining and transcribing your sound recording, as well as preparing the final product.

MONEY

Potential costs might include:

- Interviewees' honoraria or gifts.
- Interviewer's wages
- Travel expenses
- Equipment and supplies
- Transcription costs
- Office expenses (batteries, paper, etc.)
- Cost of producing and sharing final products

TIME

- How long might this project take?
- How many interviews / hours of recorded interviews will give you a good range of information? More importantly, for how many hours of interviews can you realistically prepare outlines and transcripts? Consider also the age and health of interviewees. How many hours and sessions can they manage?
- Remember that the interview will take a very small part of your time compared to research and interview preparation, then outlining, transcribing and proofing your recorded interview.
- A one-hour interview may take as much as ten to twenty hours of work to produce an edited transcript.
- How much research will you need to do before the recorded interview? (See page 8 for a list of Yukon research sources.)
- Think of less obvious time needs: planning time, travel time, funding applications, continued communications with your interviewee to clarify information, etc.

2.5 What resources are available?

Be aware of your own strengths, knowledge and skills and those of others.

Are there others who have already done research or oral history work on this topic?

Are there any funding agencies that might support your project? Who are they? What are their criteria and when are their application deadlines?

How about your own community?

The best oral history work results from community involvement and support. In return, you should do your best to ensure your work is shared with the members of your community. In this sense, the term “community” refers to any group of people with a common bond. A few examples are members of ethno-cultural associations or adults from local seniors’/elders’ social or heritage groups.

Are there people or groups able to support your work with volunteer time, donations or loans?

Examples might include: someone who can assist with paperwork, a local institution that can loan a recorder, or a local business that might donate food or fuel for a field trip.



Elder Percy Henry sharing his Hän language knowledge with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Dept. staff, 2014.
Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Archives

2.6 Are your goals still realistic and achievable?

Now that you have taken all of the factors into account, take a second look at your original goals.

Is your project plan too ambitious? Do you need to scale back, or conduct the work in phases?

A smaller project might be better. Perhaps your topic is too broad and you need to focus on just one aspect. Perhaps it would be better to interview one or two people instead of six.

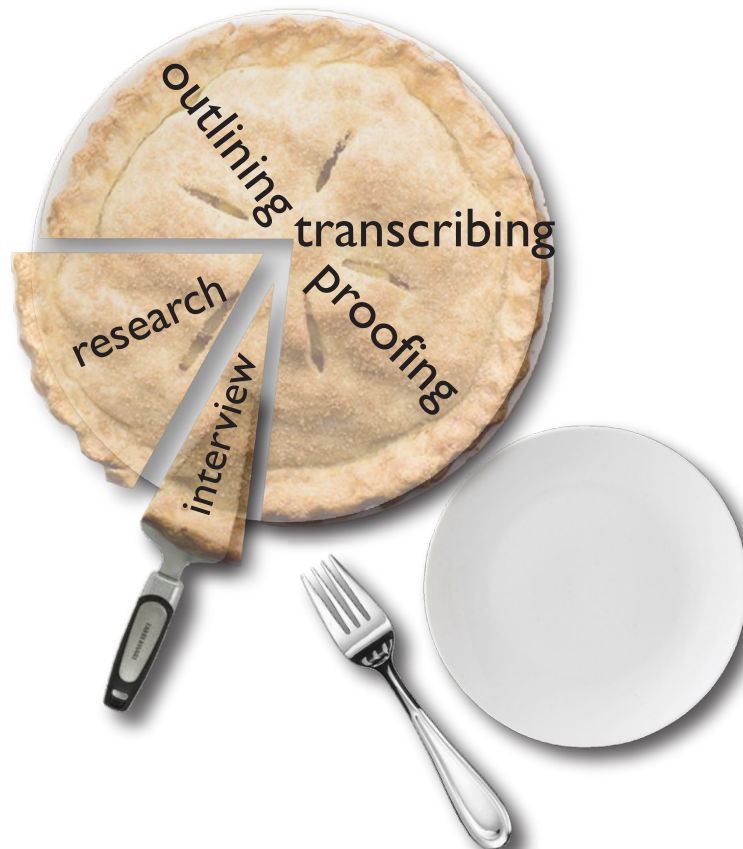
What else is happening in your life? Be realistic here, how much time can you actually spend on this project?

Don't get involved if you can't follow through. You would be letting the project down as well as showing disrespect to your interviewees.

FOCUS! Budget your own time and resources. Experts recommend that you budget your time as follows:

- 20% research and interview preparation
- 5% interview
- 75% outlining, transcribing and proofing

The better prepared you are ahead of time, the better your end product will be, the better the experience for your interviewees, and the more satisfied your sponsors/colleagues.



3. THE PRODUCT

When you plan a project, think beyond the actual interview. How will your recording be useful to others? This is when you should think big. Your interviewee has given you something of value and it is up to you to share this knowledge.

Remember that you will need your interviewee's consent for any and all future uses of their interview.

A product does not have to be high-priced or sophisticated to communicate with and enlighten your audience. Below are a few examples of the many possible uses of oral histories information.

TRANSCRIPTS (see Section 10 on Transcripts, p. 29)

PERSONAL AND COMMUNITY HISTORIES

Oral histories are valuable sources of perspectives for biographies, community histories or examinations of a particular event (e.g. building of the Alaska Highway) or period of time (e.g. changes experienced while running a highway lodge along the Alaska Highway) or perspectives on the impacts of an event (e.g. changes to a First Nations community during Alaska Highway construction). Often oral history perspectives are used in combination with other sources of historical information. These histories can be shared as booklets, books, displays, public programs or websites.

MEDIA

Some media to consider for sharing oral histories include: radio and television programs, websites, animation of traditional stories, and recordings uploaded to YouTube and similar sites. Some interpretive websites make creative use of voice and film clips as well as additional explanatory text, photographs and other illustrations.

EDUCATION

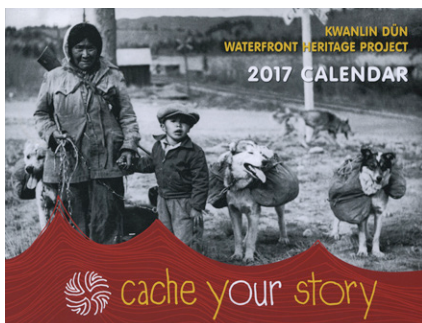
Some recordings are appropriate for: curriculum development for schools, resource materials for student assignments, environmental studies drawing upon traditional knowledge, and research and educational programs in museums, libraries and archives.

PUBLICATIONS

Interviews or excerpts may enrich other content in: books, booklets, pamphlets, posters, calendars, maps with descriptions of places, etc.

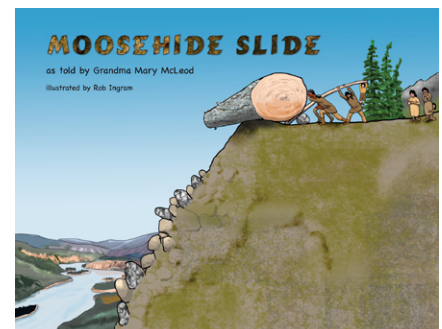
PUBLIC PRESENTATIONS

Many public programs feature oral histories: storytelling conferences, story circles, lectures and talks, dramatizations and performances, exhibits and photo displays.



Left: 2017 Calendar drawn from a community oral history project. Kwänilin Dün First Nation publication

Right: *Moosehide Slide*, as told by Mary McLeod. Published by Nenä tthē Tr'inke-in Aboriginal Head Start daycare. Illustrated by Rob Ingram, Midnight Arts



4. RESEARCH

To show your seriousness and respect for your interviewees, you should go to your interview well prepared.

A big part of your interview preparation will be research. Ideally you will be:

- Researching how best to do an oral history interview (possibly starting with this booklet and other sources listed in the bibliography),
- Researching your informant, and
- Researching the topic or period that you will be asking about.

4.1 Researching your informant

- Learn as much as you can about the general background and relationships of your informant so you will have more context for the interview.
- You need to know about their general condition, recent health problems, any memory loss or confusion. Sometimes seniors and elders might be confused about recent happenings but still have clear memories of earlier days.
- When interviewing older people, learn a little about their habits: Are they sharper in the mornings? Do they usually nap at certain times? When is the household busiest?

4.2 Researching Background History

Begin by drawing on your own knowledge and experience. What do you know and what information gaps do you need to fill? Who do you know who might have knowledge on this topic?

There is much more to historic research than typing a search term into Google. While the internet is a wonderful resource, you need to be wary of the quality of the information that turns up and what might be missing. It doesn't take a lot more work to make your research much more effective. Learn the difference between a primary source and a secondary source.



Good sources of information about your interviewee might come from your informant's family or other community members. Find out if they have done any other recorded interviews and if so, try to listen to them. If they are public figures, there might be information available about them in Yukon Archives, at First Nations heritage departments, community museums or on the internet.

Oral history workshop group researching finding aids at Yukon Archives, 2014.
Paul Gowdie photo

Primary sources are first-hand accounts of events and experiences, both public and personal. These include items like historical and legal documents, diaries, eyewitness accounts, first hand oral histories, statistical data and letters. They are a more reliable source of information.

Secondary sources are a step removed from the original accounts of an event or experience. These items describe, summarize, interpret and comment upon primary sources. Examples are history books, Wikipedia entries, newspaper or magazine articles, second hand oral accounts, and historical exhibits. These are indirect and sometimes less reliable sources of information than a primary source, but can provide a variety of perspectives and background information.

Learning about your topic in advance means that you are aware of information gaps and will have a more informed interview. It is often useful to prepare a chronology of key dates, biographical details, and events for reference.

Become a research detective. This may sound a little geeky but it is always a great thrill to piece together information from different places to discover a larger overall story. Often looking at a topic from different points of view can turn up all sorts of interesting revelations.

There are many sources you can consult to learn more about Yukon history. See the following section for suggestions of Yukon Research Sources.

Remember, all research work should be done in a respectful way. This means giving credit to your sources and ensuring that people fully consent to your use of their stories.

4.3 Yukon Research Sources

Much of your initial research can be done at a computer. Most libraries and archives, as well as many First Nations and museums, have searchable online catalogues or web information. Begin by looking through the various catalogues and finding aids then consult the institution directly if you need assistance. Remember that most institutions only have a portion of their holdings listed online.

LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

Yukon Archives

The Archives has an extensive collection of Yukon historical and cultural records including published sources, corporate records, films and videorecordings, genealogical research materials, government records, private manuscripts, company and organization records, photographs, maps, mining records, newspapers, pamphlets, periodicals and sound recordings. They also have exhibits on a number of topics drawn from their collections. Many of these displays can be viewed online.

Yukon Archives Digital Library

The Yukon Archives Digital Library provides open and free access to digitized library “hard to find” titles that have been published on or about the Yukon since the early 1880s. The titles available on the website cover a wide spectrum of subject areas: cultural history, natural history, geology, First Nations, mining, etc. Some of the materials that have been digitized include newspapers, government reports, books, booklets, and pamphlets, and government regulations.

Yukon Public Libraries

There are 15 Yukon community libraries including the Whitehorse Public Library. The Public Access Catalogue, updated daily, lists items from the collections of all of these libraries as well as the Yukon Archives Library. As well as books, the libraries carry newspapers, magazines and video recordings. If you can’t find what you are seeking, most items can be obtained through interlibrary loans.

Yukon Energy, Mines and Resources Library

Located in the federal building in Whitehorse, the library's range of materials relate to the Yukon's natural resources including aerial photos, scientific, technical and historic books, mining and geology reports, journals, newspapers, magazines and maps.

Yukon College Learning Commons (formerly Yukon College Library)

The Learning Commons supports Yukon College students but members of the general public can also purchase memberships. The holdings include several oral history collections as well as some resources on carrying out oral history research.

Yukon Native Language Centre

Located at Yukon College, the centre is a training and research centre, which provides a range of linguistic and educational services to Yukon First Nations and the general public. They have a large collection of oral history interviews but permissions may be needed from the interviewee, family members or the relevant First Nation to access or copy recordings.

HISTORICAL SOCIETIES, MUSEUMS AND CULTURAL CENTRES

A number of Yukon communities are home to local historical societies with mandates to research and preserve local history. The Yukon also hosts an interesting range of museums and First Nations cultural centres. All have valuable collections including historical records and artifacts.

A few larger museums, such as the Dawson City Museum and the MacBride Museum of Yukon History, have libraries and extensive photo collections that may be open to researchers by appointment. Smaller institutions are limited in the services they can offer depending on seasonal opening hours and staff.

CHURCH RECORDS

Anglican Church Records

Most of the Anglican Church records are located at the Yukon Archives. There is a detailed finding aid to the correspondence, historic photographs, and other records on the Yukon Archives website. For access to registers recording baptisms, marriages and deaths, you will need written permission from the Bishop.

Roman Catholic Church Records

The local parish priest may be able to provide information from parish records and daybooks.

GOVERNMENT RECORDS

Government of Yukon

Many early government records are held by Yukon Archives and can be researched using online finding aids.

The Department of Tourism and Culture, Historic Sites and Heritage Resources, employs staff with expertise in archaeology, paleontology and historic sites. The department has issued many historic and scientific publications, reports and plans, most of which are available online through the Yukon Government website.

The Yukon Geographic Place Names Board maintains, updates and administers the naming and changing of names for Yukon geographical features such as lakes, rivers and mountains.

Government of Canada

A number of early Government of Canada records are available at Yukon Archives on microfilm.

Parks Canada is responsible for a number of National Historic Sites including many historic buildings in Dawson City, Dredge Number 4, S. S. *Klondike* sternwheeler in Whitehorse, and the S. S. *Keno* in Dawson. Two indigenous cultural sites have been recognized by Parks Canada. T'äw Tà'är, located at the confluence of the Teslin River and Hutamya Chù creek; is an aboriginal cultural landscape related to the historic food gathering, travel and trade activities of the Southern Tutchone people of Ta'an Kwäch'än. Tr'ochëk, located at the confluence of the Klondike and Yukon Rivers, contains the remains of Hän fish camps, traditional plant harvesting areas, and look-out points.

First Nation Governments

Most of the Yukon's First Nations have a heritage officer or equivalent position. Many have valuable collections of oral history recordings, photographs and other historical records. It is important to understand that many of these staff members are operating with limited resources, their main purpose being to serve their own citizens, and there are likely protocols and permissions required to gain access to their collections.

Municipal Records

Yukon Archives holds records for many Yukon communities and community organizations.

MEDIA

The Yukon Archives has a collection of issues of most past and current Yukon newspapers. A number of newspapers have an online presence including *Yukon News*, *Whitehorse Star* and *Klondike Sun*. Online papers only date back to when the paper began making digital issues.

Other Yukon publications such as *Yukon North of Ordinary* and *What's Up Yukon* publish some or all of their content online. The *Moccasin Telegraph* is an online newsletter for Yukoners and former Yukoners with much interesting historical information. The *OptiMst*, Canada's longest running feminist newspaper was published from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. Yukon Archives has copies of all their issues.

CBC Yukon has donated most of their library of sound recordings to Yukon Archives.

For many years, the Northern Native Broadcasting Yukon, program Nedaa had a crew doing video-recordings of Yukon stories. Many of these programs are available at the Whitehorse Public Library and Yukon Archives.

There are websites and Facebook pages that have been set up as a forum for people with common historical interests. For example, the University of Alaska Fairbanks is hosting a site, called "Changing Communities", an Alaska Highway Project Jukebox, which includes transcripts and sound recordings of excerpts of interviews with people living and working along the highway. On Facebook, groups have been formed of people who lived and grew up in particular communities and use the page to post memories and photos.

OUTSIDE INSTITUTIONS

Many other museums and archives in Canada and the United States preserve Yukon material in their collections. Online catalogues and finding aids are a valuable way to get a sense of what they have that might be useful to you.

COMMUNITY MEMBERS OR FORMER COMMUNITY MEMBERS

This might include other elders and seniors and their families.

Also consider other people who have lived and worked in the community such as storekeepers, teachers, health workers, ministers and Mounties. Some residents or former residents may have photographs or films documenting community life.

OTHER RESEARCHERS AND RESOURCE PEOPLE

This category includes librarians, anthropologists, historians, archaeologists, linguists and other experts and some of the products of their work such as books, reports, journals professional associations and conferences.

PRIVATE RESEARCHERS AND COLLECTORS

A number of people have fascinating hobbies that make them specialists in topics such as early mining sites and artifacts, historic railway rolling stock, and Klondike Gold Rush postcards. Often they have studied their subject for many years and have valuable information to share.

Don't re-invent the wheel. Ask advice from people who know, such as co-workers, historians, librarians and archivists. There are many knowledgeable and friendly people out there.

Ask for help but be understanding of the time limits of other people.



Former residents tour Bear Creek near Dawson City as part of the Bear Creek Oral History Project, 2014.

Midnight Arts photo

5. INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Prepare a question or topic list. Many researchers feel that using an outline of topics gives you more flexibility than a set list of questions. It is possible to get too focused on the next question before you have fully listened to or followed up on a particular topic. See Appendix 1 for a sample.

Contacting / Selecting Interviewees

When selecting an informant, you want to be sure that the person has the information you are seeking and is willing to talk about their experiences.

Often interviewers plan an oral history project because they wish to record a particular person or family member. Other times they are looking for people who can share their experiences regarding a particular time period, historic site or topic. The best way to start finding people is by word of mouth. Ask friends and acquaintances about the people who might have information you seek. Family members might be able to give you information and act as first contacts and ongoing go-betweens. Once you have some names, phone or visit these individuals to ensure they really do have the knowledge you want. You also want to make sure they still have a good memory and are willing to be recorded. Sometimes they will steer you to another person.

Making contact

If possible, try to visit your informant before the actual interview. This is a chance to explain the project, how the information will be used and to ensure that the interviewee fully understands and agrees to your project. You should also explain what you will give them for their services (for example, an honorarium, copies of sound recordings and transcripts). This is also a chance to look around and check out the best possible set up for recording.

See Section 7: **THE INTERVIEW SETTING** on page 17.

Set up a time for the interview that is convenient for the informant and when they are least likely to be interrupted. Follow up with a telephone call reminder the day before the interview.

Practice using your recorder.

If you are very familiar with your machine, your sound quality will be better and the interview will be smoother.

6. RECORDING EQUIPMENT

Digital audio recorders are the current state of the art and this type of equipment is recommended as the basic tool for recording oral histories today. Unlike analog recordings — such as the tape cassettes of the past — digital sound files are easily copied and shared, and they do not deteriorate with repeated playing and handling. Digital recordings also offer a greater range in sound quality.

Selecting Equipment

Digital audio recorders come in many shapes and sizes with various options. Professionals recommend the type that have “built-in microphones” plus “input connections for two external microphones”. These inputs must be the “XLR3” type associated with professional microphones.

Digital audio recorders can be powered by AC adapters from the electrical system or alternately they can be run by batteries. When heading out to the field make sure you have a good supply of extra batteries in your bag as well as an extension cord.

There are a number of different models of digital audio recorders available. Marantz, Zoom, Tascam, Edirol and Roland all make digital audio recorders. Prices range from \$300 to around \$700 for a recorder suitable for oral history recording.

Microphones

The recorders you purchase should have internal microphones, which will be suitable for many recording situations. For maximum flexibility and sound quality in certain settings, you should also have two professional microphones that can be connected when needed to the recorder with “XLR-3” cables.

There are two types of microphones that can be used with these recorders. The first type is a dynamic microphone, the smaller “pencil” type microphones reporters have used. The other type is a condenser microphone. These microphones are more sensitive and they require power to make them work. The digital audio recorders usually supply the power through the microphone cable to make



Some types of digital recorders.

Tim Kinvig photos

the microphone work. These microphones can also be powered by a battery (usually an “AA” type battery). When needed, these condenser microphones are the best choice for working with your digital audio recorder. They are more expensive than the dynamic microphone.

Microphones can range in cost from about \$150 for the dynamic type to \$300 for the condenser type. Brands of microphones to consider include Electrovoice, Beyer or Audio Technica.

Additional equipment required includes two table top microphone stands and two six-foot microphone cables complete with XLR-3 connectors.

This equipment is suitable for recording interviews between two people sitting at a table. Sometimes this does not work for interviewees who prefer to sit in their easy chair or on a sofa, or perhaps are confined to a bed. Then extra equipment such as boom stands and longer cables would be required.

Sound File Storage Capacity

Although some digital recorders may have internal memory that will store the recorded audio, the best option is a recorder that uses external SD memory cards. These cards come in storage capacities from 2 gigabytes (GB) of storage through 4, 8, 16 and 32 GBs storage capacity. We recommend using the higher capacity cards, 16 or 32 GB. When heading out on assignments, bring spare cards in case of card failures (very rare) and to give you lots of recording time should the interview take longer than planned.

Audio Formats

Along with these software setups, users have to be familiar with setting up the audio levels from the microphones and must be aware how to set up the actual audio file recording parameters.

These digital recorders can record in different audio formats, the two most familiar being the “.mp3” format and the “.wav” format.

For oral history recording, always use the “.wav” format if available. This is especially important if the recordings are to be broadcast or used in film or other media productions, and for long term archival preservation. The “.mp3” format produces a “compressed” file — a smaller file than the “.wav” file — and of lesser quality.



Example of a condenser microphone and XLR-3 cable.

Tim Kinvig photos

These are the ideal recording tools but you can often get good results using the internal microphones of your recorder or the internal microphone of a Smartphone or Tablet.



Recordable time of SD Memory cards when recording a “.wav” file at 48 kHz at 24 Bit.

1 GB card – 46 min.
4 GB card – 3 hours, 10 min.
8 GB card – 7 hours, 42 min.
16 GB card – 15 hours, 24 min.
32 GB card – 30 hours, 50 min.

Interview Equipment Checklist

Before heading out to the interview, make sure that you have everything you need to carry out the recording and that the recorder is working properly. It would be very frustrating for you and for your interviewee to have to rebook a session because equipment is missing or malfunctioning.

Digital Recorder

- Photocopy of operating manual

(but you should already be very familiar with your recorder)

- Power cord
- SD memories cards (16 or 32 GB)

Microphone/s

- Microphone/s, cables
- Microphone stands and clips
- Wind sock if mic doesn't have a built-in wind screen

Headset or ear buds

- Monitor sound while you are recording

When recording your oral history files the “.wav” setting should be:

48 kHz sample rate, 24 Bit Depth

If the recording is to be donated to Yukon Archives or similar institution, the setting should be:

96 kHz sample rate, 24 Bit Depth

This rate produces very large recordings (large as in the size of the digital sound file created).



Tim Kinvig explaining the features of digital recorders at an oral history workshop, 2014.
Paul Gowdie, photo

Batteries

- Extra batteries for recorder and microphone (8-10 hours running time per set)

Use reputable brands (e.g. Energizer, Duracell); economy brands are unreliable.

Other Useful Items

- Clear sealable plastic bags (large for equipment, small for SD cards and batteries)
- Notepad
- Pens (ballpoint or waterproof ink)
- Small flashlight and extra batteries
- Measuring tape
- Camera
- Pocket knife

If someone else has used the equipment before you take it out, never presume that they left it set up correctly for you! Always check the settings and functioning of the recorder before you head out!

We recommend that you always do this even if you were the last one to use the equipment.



Tim Kinvig describing the characteristics of a sound file when viewed using Adobe Audition software, 2014.

Paul Gowdie photo

7. THE INTERVIEW SETTING

7.1 Recording Indoors

As part of your pre-interview research, try to get an idea of where you will be doing the interview. If indoors, pinpoint the specific interview location. For example:

- In a home. Will it be in the kitchen, living room, basement /rec room?
- In a business environment. Will it be in an office, a workshop?
- In a community centre. Will it be in an office, an open area?

If you are visiting the interviewee's home, select a time when they are most alert and least likely to be disturbed.

Keep an eye out for electrical sockets. Although most recorders are battery operated, it is good insurance to have an extension cord in case your batteries fail.

Be aware of noisemakers (clocks, fridges, kitchen noises, radio, television, furnace fans, fluorescent lights, pets, etc.) and try to minimize. Also be aware of outside noises (traffic, dogs, etc.) You may need to close windows, unplug fridges or other noisy appliances (be sure to restart after the interview!), or suggest a quieter location. Be sure to ask permission from the interviewee before moving or turning off noisemakers.

Rooms with high ceilings and kitchens with hard surfaces will bounce sound creating a slight echo effect. Rooms with drapes and carpets will absorb some sound. A good setting is at a cloth-covered table in a room with a minimum of reflective surfaces such as bare walls and metal appliances.

Also if you are sitting at a table, realize that many people will tend to drum their fingers, tap the table, rattle papers, etc. If there isn't one, consider putting a cloth (such as a small towel) under your recorder, also under the area where your subject will place their hands. Explain that you are doing this to minimize tapping or other background noises in order to produce the best quality recording of their interview.

During your pre-interview visit, check these issues and discuss with your subject how best to set up the interview. You will want to ensure that you are close enough to the recorder that the microphone/s will pick up both your voices, but not so close they feel you are invading their personal space.

Ultimately, you need to establish what is most comfortable the interviewee and you need to respect that. Just do your best to make it work.

7.2 Recording Outdoors

(Also referred to as Field Recording)

Doing an interview outdoors is much more challenging in terms of controlling sound quality. The trade-off is that you often get a better interview when people visit places that have been important in their lives. Familiar surroundings can trigger memories more readily than sitting in a room far away.

If you are recording outdoors, check whether this will be in an open area, a park, a playground, beside a road or by flowing water.

Wind is the biggest issue. Even a light breeze can create a distracting background sound on your recording.

- Use a wind sock on your microphone or check whether it has a built-in windsock.
- Try to find an area where you can shelter your recorder from the wind using a building, vehicle or even your own body.

Be safe. Tell someone where you are going and when you expect to return.

Other background sounds can include birdsong, buzzing bees, traffic, flowing water, motorboats, campfire sounds, etc. Sometimes these can add to the atmosphere of the recording; other times they can be distracting or even drown out your interviewee's voice. Be prepared to relocate your set up or pause until things are a little quieter.

When planning an outdoor interview, make sure your interviewee will be comfortable. Bring extra clothing, blankets, food and beverages; maybe even a couple of folding chairs and a little folding table.



Scene at Bear Creek, Yukon, taken during Bear Creek Oral History Project, 2014
Midnight Arts photo

7.3 Recording Situations

External Microphone

Recording an interview between two people with two external microphones

When setting up your microphones, ensure you can look over the microphones and establish eye contact.



Retired broadcaster Pam Buckway (at left) shows Yvonne Chan her technique for measuring the optimum distance from the microphones.

Tim Kinvig photos

Internal Microphone

Recording an interview using the internal microphone of a recorder.

Both informant and interviewer are sitting fairly close together and an equal distance from the recorder.

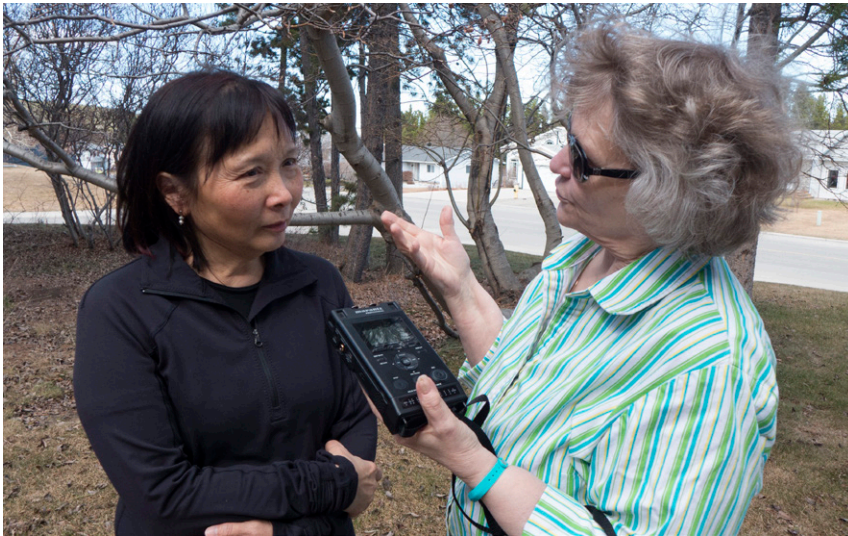


Outdoors

Recording an interview outdoors using an external microphone plugged into the digital recorder.

The recorder is carried in a shoulder bag, easily accessible so the interviewer can check sound recording levels and listen to playback to check sound quality during the session. Make adjustments to levels if needed.





Do a test recording to establish a position for the microphone where you get a good balance between the two voices. As part of the test, move the mic around a little to see if you can hear any “mic movement” noises. If there are noises, make sure you hold the mic as still as possible during the interview.

For outdoor recording, the microphone is covered with a wind sock. Ensure the cable connecting the microphone to the recorder is secure. If the connection is a little loose, tightly wrap some duct tape around the base of the microphone and the connector on the cable. Check these things before you head out to your assignment.



At a Distance

Recording an interview with the informant at some distance from the interviewer

If an interviewee is bedridden or otherwise has limited mobility, consider setting up a separate mic on a boom stand. Note that the interviewer’s table and mic are set up so she can comfortably face the interviewee. The interviewee’s mic is close by but not intrusive.

8. CONDUCTING THE INTERVIEW

8.1 Getting Started

- Ensure interviewee is comfortable and that the interview is happening at a time of day when there are likely to be few interruptions.
- Dress appropriately and consider bringing a small gift.
- Do a brief recording before the interview starts to check whether you need to make adjustments to the location of your microphone and/or the seating arrangement.
- Introduction: state your name, interviewee's name, date, location and purpose of interview. This is also a good opportunity to again explain what the project is all about, how the recording will be used and stored, and obtain verbal consent from the interviewee for the recording.
- Set the tone of the interview by speaking slowly and clearly.
- Do a sound check early on to ensure both voices are recording clearly.

8.2 The Interview

- Consider starting with basic biographical data: when and where born, schooling, work and how they came to be here.
- Go from simple to more complicated questions.
- Ask "open" rather than "closed" questions.

(Closed questions can be answered by yes or no, "Did you like living in Dawson?" Open-ended questions prompt a more thoughtful response, "What was it like living in Dawson for so many years?")

- Avoid leading questions that invite a particular answer. "So you must have been frightened when that happened?" A more appropriate question is: "Could you tell me what happened?" (Often they will end up telling you how they felt as part of the story.)
- Use the five Ws as a guide: who, what, where, when, why and sometimes how. For example:
 - * Who were the members of that hunting party?
 - * What were you hoping to find? What surprises did you encounter on the trip? What was the weather like?
 - * Where did you travel during that trip? Where were your camping spots?
 - * When did the trip take place? When did you decide to cut short the trip?
 - * Why did you decide to take that particular route?
 - * How did you travel? How did you arrange pick up and drop off?
- Use your topic list as a guide but be prepared to be diverted to other topics by the interviewee and follow up on an intriguing or incomplete answer.
- Silence is okay. Give your interviewee time to think about what they want to say next and ensure they have nothing further to say about a particular subject before jumping in with a response or another question. Do not interrupt your interviewee. This is considered very disrespectful in First Nations culture in particular.

8.3 Active Listening

- Be curious and interested. Be alert so you can recognize a point or topic that might be important and follow up.
- Remember this is an interview, not a conversation where you can interject with stories of your own experiences.
- Minimize your own presence on the recording: nod or smile, try not to interrupt with “uh huhs” or loud laughter.
- Translate what the listener can’t see (body language) at an appropriate moment, without interrupting the interviewee’s flow of speech.
“The fish was this big.” “You are holding your hands about a metre apart.”
“We saw the bear swimming over there. “You are pointing to a spot just upriver and near the opposite bank.”
- Translate local context: explain relationships, nicknames, slang and local references that others might not understand. “When you talk about Buddy, do you mean your uncle Brian?” “By the Pit, you are referring to the Westminster Hotel in Dawson City?”
- The Truth: recognize that different people may have different interpretations/viewpoints about the same events. Do not challenge or try to correct your interviewee. You are recording their memories, perspectives and understandings. There are often many different versions of details about past events, even among eyewitnesses present at the same time and place.
- While you may be asking for information about a particular topic, the interviewee may consider other stories or details more important. Record and respect what the interviewee considers important.
- Ask follow up questions. Then ask more follow up questions as appropriate and comfortable for the interviewee. Sometimes an interviewee may be uncomfortable revealing additional details. Listen and watch for signs of discomfort or reluctance to pursue a topic and respect their concerns/wishes.
- Use the pause/stop button for breaks, to allow the interviewee to rest, to collect their thoughts, or to briefly discuss what you will be talking about next. In some cases it is appropriate to pause and confirm that the interviewee is recording for a public project, which will entail others hearing the information. The interviewee, or you as recorder, may decide to limit commentary that could be hurtful, libellous or otherwise damaging to the interviewee or other people. For a digital recorder, you will be creating a new file when you start again so do a brief introduction again, e.g. “This is part 2 of Mary’s interview with Mrs. Millie Smith on May 4, 2017.”

8.4 Interview Aids

- Props can be useful: you can use photographs and maps to trigger memories, but you will need to verbally describe what you are looking at and give a description and reference. For example: “We are looking at a Yukon Archives photograph, #8412 in the Tidd collection showing the Andersons’ giant fish drying rack on the bank of the Yukon River at Forty Mile in 1934.” “This is a topographical map of the Indian River area and we are looking at feeder streams moving upriver from the mouth.”
- Use a notebook for writing follow-up questions, noting names for which you need to check spellings, or references that you didn’t quite understand, etc. This way you won’t

have to interrupt the interviewee in mid-story. After the interview, you can also note items needing follow up with research or future interviews.

- It can be very helpful to prepare a short chronology of key dates to help pinpoint when certain events happened. For example, the interviewee says: “We moved away right after the flood.” The recorder responds: “That would be in 1979 when the Yukon River flooded Dawson during spring break-up.”

8.5 Cautions

- Keep track of time and ensure interviewee does not get overtired. You can always schedule another interview.
- Discourage scandalous stories and gossip that the interviewee may regret later. Gently remind them that they are speaking “for the record” and “for posterity”.
- Ask the interviewee to repeat, and possibly even spell, unfamiliar words or phrases such as First Nation names or words in another language.
- Try to be aware of your own biases and don’t let them intrude on the interview. Don’t come across as sounding judgmental or impatient; be polite, positive and professional.
- Be a most excellent listener! But ensure that you keep on topic. If the interviewee digresses, use cues such as “Getting back to what you were telling me about ...”
- Keep an eye on the sound levels of your recorder, battery indicators, electrical current and background noises. Stop and make adjustments as needed. Unlike tape recorders of the past, you don’t see a tape moving to verify you are recording. Check that the digital recorder’s red recording light is not blinking or off. Listen to the sound quality frequently throughout the interview using earphones.



Elder Percy Henry sharing stories with Georgette McLeod. at Black City, 2004.
Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Archives

8.6 Winding up

- Give the person a chance to summarize, reflect on the past and make overall statements. For example: “Looking back, how do you feel about all those years you spent running a highway lodge.” “After your long battle to become the Yukon’s first female underground miner, how did you feel on your first day heading down into the mine?”
- Thank the interviewee, review the next steps and confirm when you will see them again. This is also a good time to get on record how the interview will be used and ensure that your interviewee verbally agrees with future use of their recording, if not done at the beginning of the interview. Even if you did this already, it is good practice to re-confirm consent at the end of the recording to ensure the interviewee has not changed their mind.

8.7 Once the interview is completed

- Stop the recording and listen to part of the playback to ensure the interview has been recorded correctly.
- Take a few minutes to chat and wind down before packing up, thanking your interviewee and leaving. Sometimes the best stories are told after the recorder is turned off. You may want to turn the recorder on again, if the interviewee agrees. Remember to say that this is an addition to the interview when you finish.
- If your informant agrees, bring a camera and take a few photos to record the setting and the interviewee.

8.8 Additional thoughts

- Don’t do the interview if you are not feeling well; you don’t want to pass illness on to an elderly person or others.
- Be flexible and be prepared for setbacks. If things don’t work out for a planned interview, have a Plan B.

Don’t make promises you can’t keep. For example, don’t commit to making copies of the interview for all members of the family when you don’t really have the time or the resources to do this.

9. AFTER THE INTERVIEW

9.1 Sound file handling and storage

Your recording is now an audio file (or may be several files depending on how many times the recording function was stopped and started during the session) on the SD card in the recorder.

The first step is to copy the contents of the card into a computer. Make a new folder on your computer and copy the files into that new folder. The files will have a name assigned to them as they were saved in the recorder when you pressed the “stop” function. If you stopped and started 3 times during the recording session, you will see the files named “1001.wav”, “1002.wav”, “1003.wav”. Those are the three files created as you stopped and started the recorder. If there were previous recordings on the SD card, then the number sequence will start at the first file you created.

You should develop a file naming protocol for the recordings you create. If you go out the next day with a new card — or if you have reformatted the card you recorded this first session on — if you record two stops and starts in this second session, when you copy those files to your computer you will find the files from this second session will also be called “1001.wav” and “1002.wav”.

Therefore, it is important to develop a file naming protocol for yourself. If you are collecting oral histories for an organization, some sort of naming system needs to be developed so everyone using the files can easily identify the files. For example: JohnSmith-MM-24Mar2017-pt2 means that John Smith was interviewed by Maureen Martin on March 24, 2017 and this is the second file for this recording. Add the project name and sponsoring institution if relevant to ensure future users know exactly what the recording file includes. Record those details on the Prior Informed Consent form, transcripts and in any finding aids produced for the project.

For safety, the newly-created files on your computer should also be copied to a stand-alone hard drive. To be extra safe, copy the sound files on two different hard drives and, once copied, the two hard drives should be kept in two different locations, preferably in fire-protected, secure environments.

Once you have made copies of the recordings, it is best to erase the original SD cards. These are not a good storage option as the cards are fairly expensive and since they are very small, they could easily be lost over time. Another problem with not erasing the cards is that the sound files may be copied by someone not authorized to have them.

Once the digital recordings have been transferred and stored safely, the SD card should be reformatted and made available for use in future sessions.

9.2 Preparing an Outline

While the interview is fresh in your mind, take some time to listen to your recording and prepare a summary or interview outline. This is when you can make note of words or names you didn’t understand and unclear items that may need follow-up.

Review the outline with your informant to ensure everything is correct. This is also a good time to ask follow up questions. Additional information and clarifications can be added in brackets.

If someone else is doing the transcribing, this will be a useful aid for name spellings, unfamiliar phrases, etc.

The outline can also be a valuable finding aid for people seeking specific information within your

interview. See Appendix 3 for an example of an interview outline.

This is also a good time to evaluate your recording and think about what you could do better next time. Make note of any problems, issues or thoughts that you came across. These reminders can help make the next session easier.

You may find that although you checked the environment beforehand, there are little noises that distract from the recording. Note what you discovered and anything you could try to eliminate the noise next time.

Ask your interviewee to sign a prior informed consent or release form. If appropriate, ensure that family members know why this recording is being done and how it will be used.

Ensure that a copy of the sound recording and any interview documentation is kept in a secure place.

Be sure to give your informant copies of sound recordings, outlines, transcripts, photographs and any final products or reports of your work.

9.3 Interview Agreements

It is important that your interviewee understands why the interview is being done and fully agrees with the intended uses. There are a few ways to confirm this. You should discuss how the recording will be used when you meet before the interview. You can mention future uses of the interview during the recording and receive verbal consent. The best way to ensure there are no misunderstandings, however, is to ensure that your informant understands and signs in advance a *prior informed consent form* or a *release form*. Repeating the terms of the project and getting verbal consent at the start of the recording as well as the signed confirmation of consent will help to avoid future misunderstandings.

Legal Issues

In preparing an interview agreement, there are a few terms and issues of which to be aware.

Copyright, literally means the “right to copy.” Copyright ownership applies to a variety of creations such as artworks, literary works, and sound recordings. Copyright owners retain “the sole and exclusive right to reproduce perform or publish a work.” Copyright holders control the use of their creations, and receive any monetary or other benefits from the reproduction and use of their works. Canadian Copyright Act also includes *moral rights* which protect the reputation of the creator and “their right to the integrity of the work”. Canadian Copyright Law is included within a body of laws relating to *Intellectual Property* which includes patents, trade-marks, industrial design, copyright, and confidential information and trade secrets.

In Canadian law, the copyright of a sound recording belongs to the maker, “the person by whom the arrangements necessary for the first fixation of the sounds are undertaken.” In simpler language, the person who recorded the interview has the copyright. While *legally* the recorder has these rights, *morally* it is very important to consider the rights of the person who is generously sharing their knowledge and experience with you. Also, if you are a contractor who is doing the recordings for an organization, that organization may stipulate it is the copyright holder as part of your contract terms. This must be explained to the interviewee as part of the consent process.

Traditional Knowledge

Traditional knowledge encompasses the beliefs, knowledge, practices, innovations, arts, spirituality, and other forms of cultural experience and expression that belong to indigenous communities worldwide.¹

Internationally, the United Nations recognized that intellectual property is a fundamental human right of all peoples with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Because this knowledge is shared in different ways, often orally — such as songs, stories, cultural practices and rituals — and evolves over time, it does not readily fit into most copyright definitions. Today there is much discussion about how best to respect and protect this knowledge. *Cultural appropriation* is a term applied to people who use and profit from indigenous stories, images and traditional knowledge without permission or credit and benefit to the originating peoples.

Issues in the Digital Age

In the past, many archival institutions restricted access to sound recordings unless permission was obtained from the interviewee or, if they had passed away, the interviewee's family. This led to many problems. People moved over the years and it could be very difficult to track down interviewees and family members. Within large families, different members might have different ideas about appropriate uses of the recordings.

Sometimes agreements specified that sound recordings could only be used for specific purposes. Researchers might be allowed to listen to the recording but could not obtain a copy, or both listening and copying might be restricted, or if a copy was made it could only be used for specific purposes. New uses for sound recordings, such as in digital media, or the increasing ease of video as well as sound recording, had not been anticipated at the time. Some sound recordings were collected informally with no interview agreements. Consequently, this often led to situations where no one could gain access to valuable information that elders and seniors had originally intended to freely share with their communities and beyond.

There are a few different approaches to these dilemmas. Yukon Archives requires that donors assign the copyright of sound recordings and images to the institution; the Archives in turn can determine appropriate use and ensure that future users properly credit the interviewee whenever the material is published.

¹ Tonina Simeone, *Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and Intellectual Property Rights*. Prepared for Parliament of Canada, Political and Social Affairs Division, 2004.



Elder Betsy Jackson removing hair from a moosehide at an Elders Camp, 2006.
Ta'an Kwäch'än Council photo



Mrs. Beth-Anne Exham during a 2016 interview at the Old Log Church, recalling her days as an Anglican Church minister's wife in Old Crow.
Midnight Arts photo

The sample forms in Appendix 2, produced by two different Yukon First Nations, show two other approaches.

Appendix 2.A and 2.B shows the Prior Informed Consent and Traditional Knowledge Release forms used by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation. In donating the recording, the interviewee recognizes the responsibility of the First Nation to safely store the recorded material and gives permission for Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in determine the circumstances under which the material will be shared with others. The agreement specifies that the interviewee retains “intellectual and moral rights to the material and will receive credit as author and creator whenever the material is published.”

Appendix 2.C shows another approach taken by a different First Nation. In this Prior Informed Consent Form, the project is described in detail with potential future uses and specifying that — unless otherwise directed — the copyright for all products of the project is to be held by the First Nation and used for non-profit purposes only.

In summary, it is recommended that your interviewee be fully informed of all potential uses of the interview products and that they only share information that they are willing to make available to a wide audience with as few restrictions as possible.



Ice fishing on Tàa'an Män (Lake Laberge) during a Spring Culture Camp, 2014.
Ta'an Kwäch'än Council photo

10. TRANSCRIPTS: PREPARATION AND ISSUES

Transcribing means that you are writing down “word for word” everything that was recorded in the interview. This is the most time-consuming aspect of an oral history project. This is when you may discover that some words are slurred, mumbled or barely understandable. Consequently you may need to play sections of the recording repeatedly to make out what is being said.

In past years, some oral historians believed that once a transcript was made, the recorded interview was no longer relevant and could be destroyed. On the contrary, the sound recording is the key document in an oral history project. Much of the personality of your interviewee will be lost if the recording is not preserved. No transcript can communicate the voice and mannerisms — pauses, inflections, chuckles — of the interviewee during the recording.

Transcribing an interview can be expensive and time-consuming. You will want to carefully assess the quality of the interview and the information it contains before deciding to do a full transcript. Sometimes it might be better to fully transcribe shorter sections of the recording, documenting particular topics or stories, and prepare shorter outlines for the balance of the recording. When making decisions about how to best document the interview, keep in mind the eventual uses for your sound recording.

If you are giving your recording to someone else to transcribe, they will be able to do a much better job if they not only have a clear recording but also an outline with the summary of the topics and spellings for unfamiliar words. When they have finished the draft transcript, you will still need to review the transcript while giving your recording another listen to ensure nothing was missed or misunderstood.

“Transcribing from any source is more than just the physical act of doing it. There is also the ability to listen carefully, an excellent command of the language, and other grammar and language skills. I have found that taking notes during the interview... along with the recording backup, puts one in the best frame of mind to do the transcription.

“The ability for anyone to do digital recording with the press of a button on a machine can be a nightmare for the transcriber when you have someone who is unfamiliar with the importance of recording properly, hand you a recording with all sorts of background noise, microphones ill-positioned, no control of over-speaking, etc.”

— Joyce Bächli, 2017

11. LESSONS LEARNED

Now that you are done, spend a little time evaluating your project. What went well and what could be improved next time?

Here are some examples of what other interviewers learned from their experiences:

“I wish I had practiced more with my recorder. I wasted time figuring out how it operated during the interview. The sound quality could have been much better.”

“I had no idea it would take so long to transcribe a recording. I did not allow enough hours for this time-consuming part of the work.”

“I was a little too focused on my question/topic list. My interviewee made several interesting comments and I should have spent more time following up instead of thinking about the next thing.”

“I never realized how much the background sounds of the (furnace, fridge, traffic outside, etc.) would show up on the recording.”

“I shouldn't have allowed the non-minor subject's relative to be in the room for the interview, as I think the subject answered my question differently due to their presence.”

“I shouldn't have allowed the non-minor subject's relative to be in the room for the interview, as the relative kept butting in to answer questions and then my subject would not say any more.”

“Keep checking for the red light. I checked everything was working, did a trial, played it back, set it up again, then settled in to talk, and didn't check that the recording light was on until half an hour had passed. I had reached out to readjust the camera and somehow flicked off the record button. Fortunately, I had a small audio recorder going at the same time to save the day.”

“Watch out for fans. I put the interviewee in what I thought was the best light, but the fan made a strobe effect that was faintly evident during the recording and really dramatic in the finished video.”

“Try to ALWAYS have the Prior Informed Consent Form signed BEFORE you record. I have encountered people who consented verbally at first, then decided not to record when they actually came to sign the release because they had not fully appreciated the terms of the project in the first discussions. Most people are pleased to record their stories for the benefit of their children, grandchildren, and community but it can be a stressful undertaking if people are worried what other people might say or think about their recordings or where and how they might be used in future.”

12. CONCLUSION

There is no one ideal way to do oral history work. You should organize your project and gear your interview to allow for the culture, opinions, and needs of both the interviewer and the informant. By being aware of some basic guidelines, you will obtain better quality recordings and more accessible information.

The memories of our elders and seniors offer glimpses into the past, fascinating experiences and wisdom. It is vitally important not just to document this irreplaceable knowledge, but also to preserve it well for present and future generations and to make it available to others.

An oral historian draws upon many skills. When organizing a project you need to be: a planner/organizer, a researcher, a technician, an interviewer, a listener, a transcriber and a record keeper. You need to demonstrate the following qualities: initiative, good interpersonal skills, good time management, patience and respect.

You won't go wrong if you keep in mind the principle of RESPECT.

- Respect any community protocols when arranging an interview.
- Respect the interviewee's time by being well-prepared and presenting yourself in a respectful way.
- Respect your interviewee's knowledge and experiences. Use their information in an appropriate way and ensure they fully understand and agree with what you are doing, and that they understand who will own and how they will use the information.
- Respect your recording. Immediately make two digital copies and make plans in advance for long-term safe and permanent storage. Document your recording with an outline and a partial or full transcription as appropriate.
- Respect your project and follow through on your commitments. It's always better to think big, but start small and finish.

Once you have a good understanding of everything involved in doing an oral history project from making a plan to sharing your final product, you can always expand the scope of your work.

- Respect the relationship established with the interviewee. You have shared in their life. Remember to greet them when you see them afterwards and, if possible, visit them on occasion. They will appreciate your consideration and friendship.

“What I bring to the interview is respect. The person recognizes that you respect them because you're listening. Because you're listening, they feel good about talking to you. When someone tells me a thing that happened, what do I feel inside? I want to get the story out. It's for the person who reads it to have the feeling ... In most cases the person I encounter is not a celebrity; rather the ordinary person. 'Ordinary' is a word I loathe. It has a patronizing air. I have come across ordinary people who have done extraordinary things.”

— Studs Terkel in *Touch and Go: a memoir*

APPENDICES

1. Sample Topic List
2. Sample Interview Agreements
3. Sample Recording Outline
4. Sample Transcript Format
5. Select Bibliography

Appendix I. Sample Topic List

This topic list was compiled as part of a group exercise during an oral history workshop sponsored by the Lorne Mountain Community Association. The group wanted to document the history of recent settlement in the valley and the history of their volunteer organizations.

Lorne Mountain Community Association Oral History Project – Topic List

Introduction: dates, names, intro to the project

Biographical date: when & where born, schooling, work history

- History of life in the Carcross valley
- when moved to area
- what life was like back then
- who were neighbours, major personalities
- major events: land claims, land planning exercises, squatters, squatter policy
- mini neighbourhoods: CCC road, Cowley, Annie Lake Road
- opening up of area, when roads built and for what purpose
 - * signs of growth
- Activities: community ski trails, parties, dances
- Working together: e.g. the food co-operative, developing the community centre
- Volunteer organizations: how formed, why needed, purpose, early participants, successes and setbacks,
 - * What were early days like?
 - * What are you most proud of?

Early personalities: homesteaders, bush hippies, squatters, etc.

Specific events affecting the area

- Skagway Road opening seasonally and then year round.
- opening of new subdivisions
- mining in the Wheaton River valley area
- closing of the White Pass and Yukon Railway in 1982

Effects of outside events

Landscape altering events: wildfires, logging and sawmills,

Relations with governments

Characteristics of early settlers: independence, community spirit, “bloody mindedness”

Visions for the future?

Appendix 2. Sample Interview Agreements

Appendix 2.A: Sample Prior Informed Consent Form



Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Government Heritage Department
Box 599, Dawson City, Yukon. Y0B 1G0
Ph: (867) 993-7100; Fax: (867) 993-6553

Recording/Transcript #(s):

Interviewee:

Date of Interviews:

Statement of Consent:

I, _____, agree to participate in interviews (see back of form) and I agree to the use of the knowledge provided for the named projects. I understand that in participating in interviews I do not have to answer any questions I do not want to and that I may choose to end the conversation if I so choose. I may also withdraw information provided during the interview. I understand that this material will be made available to the project manager identified above, but that no reproduction, use, or publication of the material will be made without the written permission of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. I understand that I retain intellectual and moral rights to the material and will receive credit as author and creator whenever the material is published.

Interviewee

Date

Traditional Knowledge Specialist/
Heritage Department Representative

Date

Appendix 2.B: Sample Traditional Knowledge Release Form



Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Government Heritage Department
Box 599, Dawson City, Yukon Y0B 1G0
Ph: (867) 993-7100 Fax: (867) 993-6553

I, _____, give permission for copies of my recorded interview and transcript to be securely stored by Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department. I am aware that as part of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Heritage Department conservation practices back-up copies of my recorded interview and transcript will be stored with Yukon Archives. Copies stored at Yukon Archives will not be accessible to the public without written permission from Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in.

I give permission for my recorded interview and transcript to be publically available through Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in. I understand that my recorded interview and transcript may be copied and used in a non-profit manner for Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in's purposes. These purposes may include: research, exhibition, audio-video production, development of educational resources, promotion of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in identity, and other related projects.

I understand that this material will be made available to researchers, contractors, or other governments, but that no reproduction, use, or publication of the material will be made without the written permission of Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in.

I understand that I retain intellectual and moral rights to the material and will receive credit as author and creator whenever the material is published.

Interview(s) and Transcript(s) included are:

Interview/ Transcript Nos.	Interviewer(s)	Project	Date (m/d/y)

I, _____ have reviewed the transcript(s) with _____

and I am satisfied with the transcripts. The following excerpts are restricted:

Location(s) of restricted excerpts in transcript #: _____ are:

Interview/ Transcript Number	Date (m/d/y)	Page Number(s)	Last line before restricted excerpt	Line following restricted excerpt

Details of Restrictions:

Termination date of Restrictions:

Interviewee

Date

Heritage Department Representative

Date

Appendix 2.C: Sample Prior Informed Consent Statement

Project Description

The XXX is undertaking a project, which will consist of recording digital stories with individual Seniors, Elders and other people. Some or all of the recordings will be used in future displays and other related projects at XXX or similar related projects undertaken from time to time by XXX. The project will begin in XXX and continue until XXX. The recordings, plus subsequent displays and related projects may be shown in other locations in future and/or reproduced in print or electronic media including a website, all of which are intended to be open to the public. Each person will be given a copy of the recordings for their personal use.

XXX invites you to participate in this project by having your stories recorded by the researchers. XXX will hold the copyright to these recordings.

Conditions of your participation

Please check the appropriate boxes to indicate whether you consent to the use of documentation collected with you:

1. Consent for audio and/or video and/or written recordings and transcripts produced from them to be used in displays & related future projects.
☐ yes ☐ no ☐ initials
2. Consent for photographs of myself to be used in displays & related future projects.
☐ yes ☐ no ☐ initials
3. Consent for photographs of my art, regalia or other materials collected during the project to be used in the display & related future projects
☐ yes ☐ no ☐ initials

Statement of Consent

I have reviewed the information provided on this form and agree to participate in the XXX project. I understand I do not have to answer any questions during the oral recordings if I do not want to.

By signing below, I the undersigned duly grant permission to XXX the right to use, publish, modify, sell, and copyright my picture, portrait or photograph, or any video footage of me (collectively called “image”), taken during the project, in all forms, media and/or manner, without any restrictions as to changes or alterations, for editorial, and non-commercial advertising, trade, promotion, exhibition, education or other lawful purposes. The XXX may not use my image for any commercial purposes without prior written consent from me. I hereby release and hold harmless the XXX and their assigns and licensees from any liability in relation

to using my image including claims of invasion of privacy or libel. I have read the release and am fully familiar with its contents. I understand that XXX will hold copyright to all of the research materials assembled.

Participant Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Print Name: _____

Recorder's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Print Name: _____

Witness Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Print Name: _____

XXX Project Manager Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Print Name: _____

Appendix 3: Sample Interview Outline Excerpt

Yukon Development Corporation Oral History Project: The NCPC Years

E.W. (Ted) Humphrys Interview, Part 2, 9 March 2004

Telephone interview recorded by Helene Dobrowolsky in Whitehorse speaking to Mr. Humphrys in Ottawa. Outline notes prepared by H.D., 9 March 2004 [Additional information in brackets.]

Time / Topic

00:05 Introduction

02:00 Talking about expansion of the Mayo Hydro Plant [in 1957]. United Keno Hill Mine required more power for their expanded operation.

05:30 How the structure of NCPC changed over time. Commissioners were senior government officials, chairman was deputy minister of the department at the time, Ted Humphreys (TH) became general manager and chief engineer. Added more staff to head office as juniors in the engineering section, one or two more in the accounting section.

TH was still travelling north several times a year.

8:15 Discussed the reasons for the move of the NCPC head office to Edmonton. This happened after TH left the NCPC in [1969]. After debate whether office should be moved to Whitehorse or Yellowknife, it was concluded that Edmonton was a better place as equal access to Yukon and NWT, plus most of the hiring and procurement of materials, etc. was based in Edmonton. TH's successor as general manager was John Lowe. TH had hired him as senior engineer. Lowe masterminded the move to Edmonton. All the senior staff moved to Edmonton although a number of the junior staff elected to stay in Ottawa.

13:30 After moving to another position, TH kept an association with NCPC as advisor to the Chairman of the Commission. TH discussed what this involved. When James Smith became Chairman in 1975, TH was still involved with Commission until his retirement in 1978. James Smith asked him to stay on as an advisor.

15:12 TH's role as an advisor. Acted as the "corporate memory" and advised the Commission re the general operation of the Commission as far as major events, acquisitions of new equipment. Also a technical advisor re what should be done or how it should be done.

18:30 After leaving NCPC in 1969, TH became Electrical Advisor to the federal Department of Energy, Mines and Resources. He talked about the creation of a new Electrical Division. TH worked for Ass't. Deputy Minister, Gordon McNabb. McNabb was prominent the Columbia River developments.

Appendix 4: Sample Interview Transcript Excerpt

Yukon Development Corporation Oral History Project: The NCPC Years

Henry Breaden Interview, 4 May 2004

Interview recorded by Helene Dobrowolsky at Mr. Breaden's home in Nanaimo, B. C.
Transcribed by Mega Reporting Ltd., 30 May 2004. Reviewed by Mr. Breaden on June 29, 2004.
[Additional information provided by Mr. Breaden on 29 June 2004 is in square brackets.]

Side A

Dobrowolsky: It's May the 4th, 2004. This is Helene Dobrowolsky at the home of Mr. Henry Breaden. Mr. Breaden, I wonder if you would mind telling me when and where you were born.

Breaden: I was born in Whitehorse in 1927.

Dobrowolsky: Now, you were born in Whitehorse, but I understand you did a lot of your growing up farther north.

Breaden: I grew up in Mayo, yes, from about 1929, why, I went to school in Mayo, and that's where I grew up.

Dobrowolsky: What was Mayo like when you were a child? What kind of a place was it?

Breaden: It was a great place for kids to grow up, because everyone was like a parent. If you got into mischief, why, you were not only accountable to your parents but to the community at large, and of course, they were to administer discipline, too.

Dobrowolsky: Which could be good or bad.

Breaden: Well, depending on your point of view.

Dobrowolsky: About how big a place was it? How big would the population have been?

Breaden: About 250 people total.

Dobrowolsky: Were a lot of those people working in the mines in the Keno area, or what were they doing?

Breaden: A lot of them were working, yes, in the mines. A lot of them were prospectors, a lot of them were trappers. And just about – well, of course there were the businesses in Mayo itself, managers for the different businesses and so on. So, we had quite a cross-section.

Dobrowolsky: And what was your dad doing?

Breaden: My dad was in transportation, running a truck up from Mayo up to Keno.

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Video-recordings

There are some useful how-to videos on YouTube. Some excellent material has been produced by the East Midlands Oral History Archive based at the University of Leicester.

Oral History Centre, University of Winnipeg

<http://oralhistorycentre.ca/tutorials>

This is an excellent resource with online tutorials in areas such as recording on smartphones, field recording, setting up microphones, etc.

