Good afternoon everyone and thank you for being joining us today.

My name is Abra Schnur and I am the university archivist at Trinity University and this year’s president of the Texas Oral History Association. I am here with Adrienne Cain Assistant Director of the Baylor University Institute for Oral History who is also the Secretary/Treasurer of the Texas Oral History Association.

We are so excited to be partnering with TDL for this oral history series. We’re hoping we’ll be able to provide insight into the considerations one needs to take when developing an oral history project. And, since I imagine the majority of attendees today are associated with digital repositories we hope this gives a bit background into the immense work it takes to create these particular digital files you are managing.
TOHA is a network for oral history practitioners that promotes the use of professional interviewing and archiving standards.

- Established in 1983
- Annual sessions with TSHA
- Annual conferences since 2012

ABRA SLIDE

TOHA is a network for oral history practitioners that promotes the use of professional interviewing and archiving standards of oral history projects and interviews.

TOHA was established out of an annual Oral History Association Conference that was held in San Antonio in 1982. We became a nonprofit organization in 1983 and assisted the state with their Sesquisentenial Commission hosting OH workshops. In 1993 we began producing the Sound Historian an annual journal featuring oral history work in Texas. Every year we hold a session at the Texas State Historical Association conference and since 2012 we've hosted our own annual conference, this year being our first virtual.
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Board of directors - 

Non voting members
In an effort to remain a relevant and sustainable organization, this year we’ve committed to diversifying our membership of practitioners, being proactive in resources sharing and support, and actively seeking presentations outside academic circles.

TOHA continues to expand our network.

- Working towards a more diverse membership of practitioners
- Being proactive in sharing resources, support, and skills,
- Actively seeking presentations outside academic circles
Today we're going to cover a lot - maybe even too much! We're going to cover what oral history is, and isn't; basic facets of project developing, the interview process, and preservation requirements.

We could devote an entire presentation to each section in our outline today, but as I mentioned earlier this presentation today will provide an overview of some of the important factors one needs to consider when doing oral history.

And with that I will hand it over to Adrienne to get us going.
What is oral history?
Oral history is...

First Person

Guided

Recorded

Preserved

ADRIENNE SLIDE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why is it important?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fill gaps in historical record</td>
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<td>Capture diverse viewpoints</td>
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<td>Help us understand change</td>
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<td>Enrich historical understanding</td>
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OLD
RICH
WHITE
HETEROSEXUAL
MALE

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- working class
- religious minority
- LGBTQIA+
- OLD
- RICH
- female
- WHITE
- HETEROSEXUAL
- MALE
- transgender
- poor
- young
- latinx
- ethnic minority
I am going to be the party crasher here and try to get you to challenge some of your notions about what you think oral history is.

More than ever media is saturated with the term “oral history.” Martin Meeker, Director for the Oral History Center at Berkeley has said that oral history “has moved from academic jargon to pop culture ubiquity.” Oral Historian Lynn Abrams notes that the term is so diluted that “every interview conducted with an individual may be labelled as oral history.”
ABRA SLIDE - I am the first to admit that I thought Storycorps was what oral history was when I was petitioning to register for a graduate level oral history course as an undergrad.

Oral history sounds similar to many things you might think of when you hear the term “oral history” - oral tradition, storytelling, testimony.

Oral history has the ability to democratize history and that is a very powerful, welcomed thing – it can affirm the narrator’s own experience, and it can celebrate a community’s own history.

However because of this there leaves an opening for oral history to be used for the romanticized or nostalgic view of the past without really any understanding as to why or how things are remembered the way they are - and that is at the crux of oral history work - that is point - it is to go in-depth into the notions that people have and explore how people interpret their own experiences - and more broadly how as society, how as determined collective history shape the remembrances of those experiences over time.

The practice of interviewing is used in a wide range of disciplines - social
sciences as part of qualitative research, the medical and legal professions as sort of evidential tool, and also as an educational and research tool in learning environments, and it is used in journalism. So how to distinguish from what is an actual oral history interview, project, or product vs. a memories or storytelling project, journalistic interview, a deposition, or qualitative survey of questions?

https://update.lib.berkeley.edu/2019/09/06/directors-column-september-2019/

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An old acquaintance of mine designs the covers of Entertainment Weekly and he posted about one of their issues doing an “oral history” of the movie Office Space.
Is this oral history?  Is this a product or an interpretation of an oral history project?
1. It’s an interview - it is an exchange between a knowledgeable interviewer and a narrator
2. It’s recorded, preserved, and made available to others
3. It’s historical in intent - it looks for insights and perspectives into the past.
4. It’s recognizes the element of subjectivity
5. It’s an inquiry that is in-depth

There are several characteristics to oral history -

- Oral history is not recordings of conversations, events, speeches, audio visual dairies or testimonies
- they are not recordings that lack the guided dialog between an interviewer and an interviewee. Oral history recognizes subjectivity - if you don’t understand the impact that your own physical self and your own experiences have on the interview, you are not doing oral history. If you don’t understand how the question development and your guidance of the interview doesn’t shape the outcome of the interaction between you and the interviewee - you aren’t doing oral history- part of the analysis that can be involved in OH projects is the reflection of one’s self and how that has impacted the project.
- Oral history is in-depth - they are not interviews that are timed - it’s not “you have 15 minutes in this recording booth to tell me about growing up in this town” and they usually take several sessions to complete.
- Oral history is not recordings that are recorded without the intent to preserve and make available for a wider audience- so interviews that are conducted for quick informational value and with no intention to preserve the raw data is not oral history
- Oral history is historical in intent - it looks for insights and perspectives into the
past - so it’s not capturing events as they are happening - and if you are capturing interviews as an event is unfolding - there needs to be follow-up later on to gain that historical perspective. 

At the root of what makes an oral history, an oral history, is the methodology by which it is conducted and processed.
Oral history is a methodology grounded in process

“An interview becomes oral history only when it has been recorded, processed in some way, and made available...Availability for general research, reinterpretation, and verification defines oral history.” – Donald Ritchie

“Oral history is characterized by a structured, systematic planning process, thorough research, careful consideration of copyright, emphasis on the depth and detail of information collected, and adherence to strict processing techniques.”

– Barbara Sommers

So to make a solid oral history project – that process, that method in which you plan out your project, conduct interviews, make the interviews available for access and interpretation – needs to stay consistent across your project – and it needs to stay consistent across the discipline, which is why we have standards and best practices – so the field of oral history can produce quality interviews that can be used as primary historical documentation.
Principles & Best Practices


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Legal and Ethical Considerations

A Guide to Oral History and the Law

- Donor agreements
- Narrator rights
- Examples/scenarios of legal matters

Use OHA’s Principles and Best Practices as your ethical guide

- Building trust and rapport with your narrators
- Informed consent
- Correct representation of narrators
So you want to do an oral history project - there are two main things that you need to do before you even begin to think about that venture - they are training and research.

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Training - this presentation is a good first start but there is simply not enough time to go over all the points in developing, implementing, and successfully completing an oral history project. I recommend taking workshops with the Baylor Institute for Oral History or with the Voces Oral History Project.

And if you have already decided “you know actually what I wanted to do was something more like Storycorps” 1) I am glad you were able to come to that understanding but 2) you will still need to get training - StoryCorps products are highly edited and highly stylized 3 minute audio segments - so I would certainly recommend taking classes in podcasting, audio visual storytelling (how to edit and craft those stories), and training on using audio visual editing software. Any really in both cases you’re going to need training and practice on how to use and handle your equipment.

Research - Again, oral history is not just hitting record and letting the narrator talk about whatever they want to talk about. It requires the interviewer to be well versed on the topic they are covering so they are more likely able to get to those insights for meaning. Depending on the topic and how “in it” you are this can take months, or years to feel comfortable enough to begin interviewing.
Project Planning

Start with the end in mind

What does “finished” look like?

How will you track your progress?

Who is responsible for what?

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Project Design

- Title
- Topic/Purpose
- Methodology
- Scope: time, place
- Potential narrators
- Selected archives
- Planned outcomes
- Time frame for completing project
Interview Process

Before, During, and After

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Pre-Interview Checklist

Build rapport with your narrators

Go over your project (your project design will help with this)

Choose your recording location

Check to see if there are any photos, scrapbooks, or other items available

Discuss potential topics and gather and biographical data that may be missing

Develop your project outline
Items to have on hand

Your outline
Recording equipment
Notepad and pen/pencil
A watch (or silent time-keeping device)
Forms
Extra batteries, power cords, etc.
During the Interview

Use open-end questions and discussion

“How did you handle…?”

“Tell me about your experience with…”

Get examples and ask for elaborations

Allow the narrator to fully share their experience

Take notes during the interview

A good interviewer is a good listener
Post-Interview

Be sure to thank your narrators for their time

Make a copy of the interview (and leave the original alone)

Transcribe

Keep your narrators in the loop

Preserve your interviews
Preservation

“The obsolescence of all media formats should be assumed and planned for.”

- OHA

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Preservation of and access to interviews is one of the tenets of oral history practice - so it is very important that you have an archiving and preservation plan in place. Preservation and archiving tends to be thought of as something you do after the fact, but it is a very present act and as we mentioned earlier, it’s an act you should be thinking of at the beginning stages of the project.
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Here are a few things to think about in terms of preservation. 1) where this data will be stored 2) file formats 3) and file descriptions

This presentation is geared towards people who understand the importance, the challenges, and the implications regarding the lack of digital preservation. So I am not going to go into detail about that. But as a repository that will potentially be stewarding this material, it’s important to understand where a digital archives or library fits into the realm of an oral history project.
Remember the acronym LOCKSS - Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe - keeping multiple copies of your files on different storage media is crucial to preserving your digital files. If you have access to server space, that’s a good location for your original preservation files. This can also be said for dark archive cloud storage such as Amazon Glacier. Additionally, for back up preservation files consider purchasing one or more external disk drives, save your files to them and store the drives in different locations. For access and working copies consider cloud storage through services such as DropBox or Google Drive or on your local computer.

Pres files - server/dark archive
Backup - external hard drive
Access/Working - cloud storage or local computer

Oral history practitioners should select an archival repository that 1) relates to their project but 2) is equipped to handle the management and access to audiovisual materials and digital files for long-term preservation.

Oral history practitioners should ask important digital preservation questions when shopping around - and you as a repository, should be honest about your capabilities.
Example: When I was doing my project on Braniff International in the DFW, I contacted UT Dallas because they have the Braniff collection there. They were very transparent about their digital preservation capabilities. I ended up archiving my oral history project at the University of North Texas because they have an oral history program there, and it was still in the region of where Braniff operated out of.

Transferring files

- On physical storage media – (i.e. floppy disks, CDs, DVDs, magnetic tape cartridges, memory cards, hard drives, or USB drives)
- FTP - File transfer protocol –
- Cloud transfer - This will allow donors/depositors to upload digital content for transfer. While user-friendly there may be issues around size limits and security.
- Email – While this option is not recommended (issues of security apply and size limits
The goal should be to create recordings that are either uncompressed, utilize lossless compression, and/or are saved in widely adopted file formats. It hard to get that combination, especially with video formats. but generally speaking it is good to save your files as MPEG-2, MOV for preservation copies and MPEG-4 as access copies.

Archives and oral history practitioners settled on a standard to preserving digital audio - default formats for saving audio interviews should be a WAV file and access and working derivatives should be MP3.

A good resource for all this is Oral History in the Digital Age, and it will be posted on the resources page.
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When I say file descriptions - I mean everything from the naming file structure to the elements in your metadata schema.

The project team should be making metadata and decisions on metadata at the inception of the project - it is your project proposal and outline. It is the biographical information you are obtaining as you seek interviewees and are conducting pre-interviews, it is the information you are capturing the day of the interview - the intro statement at the beginning of every interview, the notes and summaries you write from the interviews.

Most archives do not have the staff to transcribe, to abstract, or to create detailed metadata – and you as the interviewer or the project team is the authority on this information, you did the project, not the staff who is going to be processing the interviews - you are the authority, you have the ability to detail the project the way that it should be.

A good resource to get you started in thinking about the description of
interviews is curating oral histories by Nancy Mackay

But also, I do want to share, that the OHA Metadata task force has been working for like last decade on researching developing a list of elements that should be considered when creating description for oral histories.

Preview of this work at the next TDL webinar
So what have we talked about today

What is and what isn't oral history

Project Planning

The major steps in the interview process

And the need to preserve your interviews

There was a lot we left out today but the main thing we want you to take away is to make sure you have your ducks in a row when beginning this process.
Resources


- Remote Interviewing Practices - [https://www.oralhistory.org/remote-interviewing-resources/](https://www.oralhistory.org/remote-interviewing-resources/)

- Baylor University Institute for Oral History - [https://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/](https://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/)

- Voces Summer Research Institute - [https://journalism.utexas.edu/home/voces-oral-history-research-summer-institute](https://journalism.utexas.edu/home/voces-oral-history-research-summer-institute)

- Oral History in the Digital Age - [http://chd.amatrix.msu.edu](http://chd.amatrix.msu.edu)

- Texas Oral History Association - [https://www.baylor.edu/toha/](https://www.baylor.edu/toha/)
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