An Oral History of Our Time. 
(Or What I Think I Know.)

Oral History Workshop
Troy Reeves
UW Oral History Program
UW-Madison Archives
First, a word of thanks

- Westmorland Neighborhood Association
  – History Committee & Tom Martinelli
- Sarah White
- DaneARTS
- You all
Who am I?

Why am I here?
My Story

Idaho State University
Grandmothers, Senior Thesis

Utah State University
Folklore Fieldwork, MA

Idaho State Historical Society
Volunteer, 1996-1998
Oral Historian, 1999-2006

UW-Madison Oral History, 2007-Present

Managing Editor, *The Oral History Review*

Arco, Idaho, showing Numbers Hill.
From dailyyonder.com
Who are you?

Why are you here?

(Optional)
Libraries’ Mission:

We meet the changing needs of the academic community by providing:

- Leadership for the selection, organization, access, and preservation of sources of knowledge in all formats;
- Exemplary information services designed to fulfill the needs of a great public university;
- Inspirational environments for collaborative and individual discovery, study, and learning.

Steenbock Library (building on right), ca. 1970s, UW-Madison Archives Images Collection, S07193
Archives’ goals:

**Preserve** university’s historic record

**Provide** records management services

**Serve** as an educational resource

1970s Bed Race, UW-Madison Archives Images Collection, S03692
Elroy “Crazy Legs” Hirsch, 1941
(OH #440), UW-Madison Archives
Images Collection, S07193

UW—Madison OH Program

• Collect
• Curate
• Communicate
• Collaborate
OH Program Narrators

Margaret H’Doubler (1889-1982)

–Professor, Physical Education and Dance

At UW: 1906-16; 1917-1954

–2 1/4 hrs., transcript, #609

–Dance v. Basketball?

Margaret H’Doubler in classroom, 1965; picture by B. Baenziger; UW-Madison Archives Images Collection X25-3252
OH Program Narrators

Howard Temin (1934-1994)
– Professor of Oncology
At UW: 1960-1994
– 3 1/2 hrs., transcript, #430
– Nobel Prize Speech: No smoking please.

Temin in lab, 1987, UW Madison
Archives Images, S00159
Dow protest seen through broken window, 1967-10-18, University of Wisconsin—Madison Archives images, S04778

Wagner, R. Richard “Dick” (b. 1943)
– UW Graduate Student (History), Dane County elected official, Wisconsin State employee At UW: 1965-1971
– 2.5 hours, transcript, #904
– Protests in the 1960s.
OH Program examples

Cronon, William (b. 1954)
– Undergraduate Student; Professor of History At UW: 1972-76; 1992-Present
– 7 sessions, 10 hours, #548
– Mentors: Dick Ringler

Bill Cronon, from
http://www.geography.wisc.edu/faculty/cronon/
Joe Gould’s Secret

- Quote (pp.12-13)
- Importance

*Joe Gould’s Secret* trailer:
http://www.imdb.com/video/screenplay/vi849936665/
Oral History hits the mainstream

Kent Brockman:

During her years on the lam, Simpson lead an exemplary life working as an oral historian, reader for the blind, listener for the deaf, and reacher for the short. Yet local villain Montgomery Burns, seen here terrorizing children in a nineteenth century wood-cut, insists that she stand trial.


Picture from boards.sonypictures.com.
Oral History hits the mainstream (2)

Oral history is everywhere!

StoryCorps

New York Times’ 1 in 8 million

Books, articles, blogs, etc

…

But is it oral history?

Article by Jake Austin.
At grantland.com
Time for a Tangent

Oral History in the Digital Age
The Ask Doug feature on the OHDA website. URL: ohda.matrix.msu.edu/doug/

Oral History in the Digital Age (1)

- Multi-year, grant funded project
- Designed to assist: those conducting interviews and those evaluating grant proposals
- Key point: All 3 aspects of OH intersect in digital age
Oral History in the Digital Age (2)

• Most recent issue of the *Oral History Review*
• 14 articles, 1 review essay, & dozens of book and non-print media reviews
• 7 articles have universal access

It’s me with the new issue!
Oral History: Its Practice

Pre-Interview

Interview

Post-Interview
5 Things I Think I Know (Pre-Interview)

Number 1
– Know what oral history is (and what it is not)
  • A story about oral history
  • Definitions of oral history
  • Key points of definitions

Oral History, as defined by the Oral History Association

“The Oral History Association promotes oral history as a method of gathering and preserving historical information through recorded interviews with participants in past events and ways of life.”

Oral History Association’s website: oralhistory.org
Oral History, as defined by Don Ritchie

“Simply put, oral history collects spoken memories and personal commentaries of historical significance through recorded interviews. An oral history interview generally consists of a well-prepared interviewer questioning an interviewee and recording their exchange on audio or videotape.”

5 Things I Think I Know

Number 2:

Choose a topic or person that interests you

Mucks family during World War II. Serving the Wisconsin Alumni Association in many different capacities, including a stint as Executive Director, Arlie, Jr. (far left) has been one of the most visible representatives of the University of Wisconsin--Madison for more than 50 years. UW—Madison Archives image collections, Series 3/1, Box 107.
5 Things I Think I Know

Number 3

– Get to Know Me! [Research]

• A key aspect of entire oral history process

• Good preparation, better interview. Or the Seven Ps

• Where to go to find it

Memorial Library (taken from WHS Library), n.d. University Archives image S00270
Research: An Example

Example: The Boise High School Sit-down Strike of 1937

Boise High School. From boisehigh1980.com
5 Things I Think I Know

Number 4

Get to Know Me! [Pre-Interview]

- Let’s narrator ask questions of you
- Another way to gather research
- Help build rapport
  - Rapport (noun): Relationship, particularly one marked by harmony, conformity, accord, or affinity

Memorial Library Stacks, n.d., University Archives image S000125
5 Things I Think I Know

Number 5
Get to know me! I mean, Get to Know Your Equipment!

Marantz PMD 661, Super-sweet digital recorder
Equipment: Details, details

What to bring?
1. Recording Device
2. “Tapes”
3. External microphone & microphone “stand”
4. Power cord adaptor
5. Batteries
6. Extension cord
7. Props (pictures, newspaper articles, etc.)
8. Notepad/pen or pencil
9. Legal release
Equipment: More Thoughts

Where to get it?
1. Shop at local stores
2. Go to a large city (large market/more competition)
3. Surf the internet

What we use? Why no video?

Zoom H2 & Digital Camera. From tnt-audio.com
Pre-Interview: Key Points

• 1. Choose an interesting, doable topic
• 2. Research topic
• 3. Find narrator(s)
• 4. Contact narrator(s)
• 5. Create question or topic list
• 6. Meet narrator(s)
• 7. Test your equipment
Oral History: Its Practice

Pre-Interview

Interview

Post-Interview
5 Things I Think I Know

Number 1

Control the (sound) environment.

Or, Guess that Noise?!?

Oral History Recording: Gene McVey, courtesy of Idaho State Historical Society; Picture from fs.fed.gov
5 Things I Think I Know

Number 2

Ask Good Questions, Listen (not Just Hear) the Answers

From the “Oral Histories of the American South” collection at Southern Oral history Program
URL: docsouth.unc.edu
Questions?

Types of questions

- Closed
- Open
- Neutral
- Follow-up

1998, WHA radio broadcaster Larry Meiller records a broadcast in a studio. University Archives Image S07720
Listen, not Just Hear

• Examples from my life (not listening)
• Examples from your life (not listening)
• How should you listen?

5 Things I Think I Know

Number 3

–Ask better follow-up questions

1945, In a barn, R.H. Rasmussen interviews Burt Winchester and Wilbur Renk, who are holding lambs, for the WHA radio show. University Archives Image S07717
Chicken v. Egg?

Or, Asking the questions v. Listening to the Answers

Snake River Canyon, near Twin Falls, Idaho.
Picture from bigdamnbnd.com
Oral History Interview with Mary Peavey Brooks, OH#1268, Idaho State Archives
5 Things I Think I Know

Number 4

—Be aware of silences both actual and perceived

Picture found at cameras.about.com
Interview: Key Points

• 1. Check interview area for possible noises
• 2. Ask questions
• 3. Listen to answers
• 4. Take notes (but sparingly)
• 5. Ask follow-up questions
• 6. Enjoy the silence
• 7. Know when to finish (or Number 5 on the 5 Things I Think I Know)
Oral History: Its Practice

Pre-Interview

Interview

Post-Interview
5 Things I Think I Know About

Number 1:

Get a signed release form
Legal Release

- Place for name, signed name, date
- Language stating rights
- Statement of possible use
- Room for restrictions
SECTION 2: INDEXING AN INTERVIEW AND CREATING THE ABSTRACT

An index is a time-coded summary of the content of an interview. It is preferable for the interviewer to create the index and abstract because of his/her familiarity with the interview itself, but other OHP staff may compile the index and abstract after listening to the interview. The index includes: a) header information about the narrator and interview, b) an abstract summarizing the interview contents, c) a list of key topics and people in the interview, and d) a more comprehensive time-coded summary of the interview. A copy of the index is provided to narrators and is also available to patrons interested in the content of the interview.

1. Open the Template file. (R:\Oralhist\Processing_Guide_Docs\Template_000_index.rtf).

2. Save and rename the template file using the “Save” function in Word (Alt-F-A). In the Save As dialog box, change the template file’s name to its new designation. Our index file name format includes the last name of the interview subject, the interview number, and the word “index,” followed by the .rtf file type. For example, Boyer_828_index.rtf. (The index template is currently saved as an .rtf, so this should not need to be changed)

3. The newly designated index file should be saved in the interviewee’s folder (e.g. R:\Oralhist\Oral_History_Interviews_All\Interviewee.J.000) which also contains the digitized interview on which the index is based. If a working copy of the index is created, the final copy should always be saved in the interview subject’s appropriate folder.

4. Change the header information. Each index contains the following header information about the interview and narrator, as shown in the example header below: (a) Interview number; (b) NAME [bold, all caps] and birth/death years, if known; (c) All positions/titles held at UW. Often mentioned in the interviewer’s introduction; (d) Years at UW; (e) When the interview was conducted (including how many session); (f) Who conducted the interview; (g) Who indexed the interview; (h) The approximate length of the interview. This information should be updated to match the interview being indexed.

| UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON ARCHIVES |
| ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM |
| (a) Interview #876 |
| (b) MITCHELL, Jack |
| (c) MITCHELL, JACK (1941- ) |
| (d) Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communications, Wisconsin Public Radio; WHA Radio |
| (e) At UW: 1968-69, 1976- |
| (f) Interviewed: 2007 (4 sessions) |
| (g) Interviewer: Troy Reeves |
| (h) Index by: Stephen A. Pierce |
| (h) Length: 5 hours, 25 minutes |

Number 2:
Go the Distance!

[“Finish” the interview]

“Finish” the “tape”
“Finish” the paper documentation

Index (Pros and cons)
Transcribe (Pros and cons)

Work with Repository
5 Things I Think I Know About

Number 3:

Pursue the follow-up interview

Oral History Interview
Picture from history.utah.gov
5 Things I Think I Know About

Number 4:

Write a thank-you note

January 8, 2009

W. Lee Hansen
3215 Topping Road
Madison, WI 53705-1434

Dear Lee:

This is a formal thank you for allowing me to interview you to start (I hope) a collection of interviews about campus literary magazines. Specifically, your insight as it pertained to the Athanaean Magazine will benefit current and future generations. Personally, I also appreciated your memories of the undergraduate experience here in the late 1940s/early 1950s.

If you would like a copy of the recordings, please let me know. I will burn them onto a CD and get them to you. For your information this oral history will augment the previously conducted interview with you (number 209 in our collection).

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

Sincerely,

Troy Reeves
Head, Oral History Program
Archives & Records Management Services
430 Steenbock Memorial Library
550 Babcock Dr.
Madison, WI 53706
(608) 890-1899
treeves@library.wisc.edu

PS As I mentioned to you, I will try to find campus folks willing and able to conduct a few more interviews with other former Athanaean folks.
5 Things I Think I Know About Number 5: Communicate

- Campus Voices
- Blogs: The Oral History Review at the OUPblog
- Presentations, like this one

From Archives’ Campus Voices
http://archives.library.wisc.edu/uw-archives/exhibits/nobelprize/
Post-Interview

1. **Sign** legal release form
2. Stay and chat
3. “Finish” the interview:
   - Label recording
   - Copy recording
   - Index and/or transcribe recording
   - Listen to recording
4. Write a thank-you note
5. Publish, in some way, your results
6. Donate, if possible, oral histories to archives/repository
The Power of Oral History

• The past practices of oral history centers
• Two examples: Bobby Montoya (OH #1851, IOHC) and Gertrude Maxwell (OH#0449, IOHC)
• Best days on the job

Oral history clip from Gertrude Maxwell, OH #449, Idaho State Archives; picture taken by Reeves family, August 2010
OH Best Practices: Post-Interview

• Review recording, Create “summary,” Decide on follow-up interview
• Publish interview in some way
• Start (continue) conversation with repository for future access to your recording/material
• For more information, see Oral History Association’s updated Best Practices Guide at http://www.oralhistory.org/do-oral-history/general-principles-for-oral-history-and-best-practices-for-oral-history/
2 More Things I Think I Know About

• Number 1:

Take this endeavor seriously but have fun, too!
2 More Things I Think I Know About

Number 2

Oral history’s power can best be shown by the voices, not typed-out words, of its narrators.

Oral history clip from Robert Montoya, OH 1469, Idaho State Archives; picture from fs.usda.gov.
Last (catch) phrase: Just do it!

(With apologies for Nike to stealing a bygone slogan.)

1938 Badgers Men’s Basketball Team, 1938 Badger Yearbook, and UW-Madison Images Collection, S006393
An Oral History of Our Time.
(Or What I Think I Know.)
The End

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UW Oral History Program, UW—Madison Archives

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