St. Paul’s Oral History project – June 2011

Adapted from Oral History Association Guidelines and The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide

* Interviewees hold the copyright to their interviews until and unless they transfer those rights to an individual or institution. This is done by the interviewee signing a release form
* Oral historians respect the narrators as well as the integrity of the research. Interviewers are obliged to ask historically significant questions, reflecting careful preparation for the interview and understanding of the issues to be addressed. Interviewers must also respect the narrators’ equal authority in the interviews and honor their right to respond to questions in their own style and language. In the use of interviews, oral historians strive for intellectual honesty and the best application of the skills of their discipline, while avoiding stereotypes, misrepresentations, or manipulations of the narrators’ words.
* Along with asking creative and probing questions and listening to the answers to ask better follow-up questions, the interviewer should keep the following items in mind:
* Interviews should be conducted in accord with any prior agreements made with narrator, which should be documented for the record.
* Interviewers should work to achieve a balance between the objectives of the project and the perspectives of the interviewees. Interviewers should fully explore all appropriate areas of inquiry with interviewees and not be satisfied with superficial responses. At the same time, they should encourage narrators to respond to questions in their own style and language and to address issues that reflect their concerns.
* Interviewers must respect the rights of interviewees to refuse to discuss certain subjects, to restrict access to the interview, or, under certain circumstances, to choose anonymity. Interviewers should clearly explain these options to all interviewees.
* Interviewers should attempt to extend the inquiry beyond the specific focus of the project to create as complete a record as possible for the benefit of others
* In recognition of the importance of oral history to an understanding of the past and of the cost and effort involved, interviewers and interviewees should mutually strive to record candid information of lasting value

Guidelines:

* Take notes and videotape the interview (could also use a tape recorder).
* Set the Flip camera on a tripod facing the person being interviewed. Ideally have the equipment ready and tested prior to the interview starting.
* Show interest and listen carefully to what is being said.
* Keep eye contact and encourage him or her with nods and smiles. Participate in the conversation without dominating it.
* Try not to interrupt and don’t be afraid of silences — give the person you are interviewing time to think and respond. Be alert to what the interviewee wants to talk about and be prepared to detour from your list of questions if he or she takes up a rich subject you hadn’t even thought of.
* Remember that the interviewee must give permission for the interview to become part of St. Paul’s Archive. The interviewee must sign the Interview Information Form.

After the interview

* Label all your notes with the date, name of person interviewed, location of the interview, interviewer’s name, project title, and any thematic information that might be helpful. Also provide the information where the file in located on the computer.
* Upload the interview – Archives – Oral History – use the following naming protocol:
  + Year OH Last name First name
    - Eg. 2011 OH Mustard Laura
  + If more than 1 file by the same person – add the number of the file behind
    - 2011 OH Mustard Laura – pt 1
* Complete Interview Information Form as soon as possible after the interview (to be kept with your notes). Will be used as an access point.
  + Log topics discussed and approximate time within interview so we can go back later and select portions to listen to/transcribe. We will not be transcribing these interviews due to time limitations.
* Fill in Oral History Log – will be used as an access point.

See:

Oral History Association: <http://www.oralhistory.org/>

*The Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide* http://www.folklife.si.edu/resources/pdf/interviewingguide.pdf