

# Kentucky Oral History Commission

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# Kentucky Oral History Commission

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*From left to right: Al Smith, John Ed Pearce, and Dr. Lynnwood Montell.*

- Established by statute 153.380 in 1976.
- Overseen by a twelve member appointed board and at least eleven advisors.
- Fosters statewide oral history documentation through granting programs and outreach.
- Supports – and serves as a unifying influence for – oral history programs and archives throughout the Commonwealth.

**But I am not an  
oral historian...**

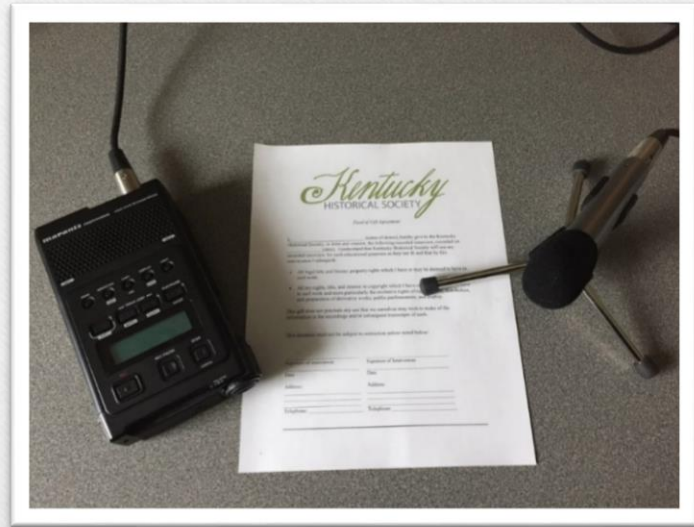
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# What is an oral history?

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A **recorded** dialogue between **two people** that captures **personal memories** of **historic significance**.



*Solid state digital recorder and legal release agreement.*

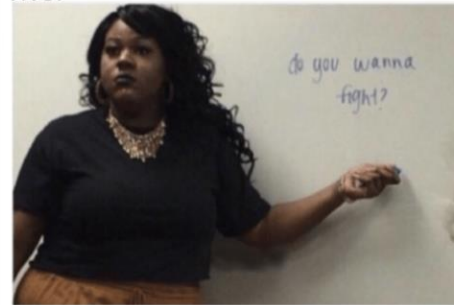
**ONLY OLDER PEOPLE SHOULD  
BE NARRATORS OF ORAL HISTORIES**



**YOUNGER PEOPLE HAVE NOT  
EXPERIENCED ENOUGH TO BE INTERVIEWED**

Person: I wrote down my family's oral history.

Me:



**ME WAITING ON THIS  
PRESENTER TO GET TO THE POINT**

**THE WAY I FEEL WHEN...**



**LISTENING TO AN ORAL HISTORY  
INTERVIEW WITH FOUR NARRATORS**



# Community Oral History Projects

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- Determine multiple roles: project manager, interviewer, equipment manager, archivist, etc.
- Is your project team diverse?
- How will they be trained?



*Kentucky Community Scholars class, Hindman, Ky. Photo courtesy of the Kentucky Arts Council.*

# Questions to answer before you start

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- Where will the interviews be archived?
- What type of paperwork is required?
- What will the interviews be about?
- Who will you interview?
- What equipment will you use?
- How will you do research?
- What questions will you ask?

# Where will your interviews live?

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*Kentucky Historical Society/Kentucky Oral History Commission closed-reel tape storage.*

## A Good Repository

- Accepts archival materials.
- Is climate controlled.
- Accepts and cares for born-digital files.
- Employs trained personnel.
- Is open to the public (somehow).
- Provides a searchable index or database.
- Makes sense with the project topic.



# What type of paperwork is required?

- A legal release agreement – must be obtained before any public use. Oral history interviews are subject to copyright laws.
- Data sheets or information forms should accompany interviews.
- Indexes are nice!

*Kentucky*  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

*Deed of Gift Agreement*

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (name of donor), hereby give to the Kentucky Historical Society and the Kentucky Oral History Commission, in form and content, the following recorded interview, recorded on \_\_\_\_\_ (date). I understand that Kentucky Historical Society will use my recorded interview for such educational purposes as they see fit and that by this conveyance I relinquish:

- All legal title and literary property rights which I have or may be deemed to have in said work.
- All my rights, title, and interest in copyright which I have or may be deemed to have in said work and more particularly the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, and preparation of derivative works, public performances, and display.

This gift does not preclude any use that we ourselves may wish to make of the information in the recordings and/or subsequent transcripts of such.

This donation shall not be subject to restriction unless noted below:

Signature of interviewer \_\_\_\_\_ Signature of Interviewee \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

# Who will you interview?

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- Write down an historically important event that happened when you were a child.
- Describe how you felt about it then.
- Describe how you feel about it now.
- How has your perspective changed?
- What factors influenced those changes?



# What equipment will you use?

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## Considerations

- What is your comfort level?
- What can you afford or borrow?
- Will it record an uncompressed file at 96khz 24bit?
- Will it accept an external microphone?
- How and where will files be stored (media)?

## Options

- Mixpre3 - \$650
- Marantz PMD561 - \$250
- Tascam DR-40 - \$180
- Zoom H4N - \$200
- Your existing laptop with USB microphone \$270



# Setting up an Interview

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*Kentucky Historical Society, Wolff, Gretter,  
Cusick and Hill Studios Negatives*

- Choose an interviewee.
- Choose location options.
- Call your interviewee and have a conversation.
- Be honest about time.
- Test your equipment.
- Do not give questions in advance; do give general topics.

# Research and Questions

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*"No Single Sparrow Makes a Summer" author interviews a narrator. Photo courtesy of the Louisville Story Program.*

# During the Interview

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- Ask a “softball question” first.
- Give an introduction.
- Start a trend of long answers.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Avoid closed-ended questions.
- Confirm you are listening nonverbally.
- Be “okay” with silence.
- Do not interrupt – handle tangents gracefully.
- Try not to ask leading questions.
- Be ready with follow-up questions.
- Ask for specific examples.
- Look for signs of exhaustion.

# After the Interview

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- Move audio files to a hard drive and/or server.
- Name files as the repository suggests (or at least consistently).
- Send a copy to the interviewee.
- **Write a thank you note** and provide the file.
- Complete an interview information form.
- Index.



# Support for Collecting Oral Histories

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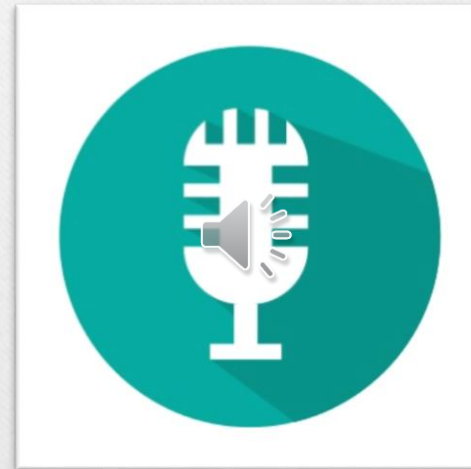
- Technical Assistance
  - Equipment loan
  - Training
- Project Grant
  - Up to 7,500 with 1:1 match
  - \$100 per interview hour
  - Travel, supplies, equipment, etc.





Record like *anyone*  
could be listening.

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# Collecting Initiatives



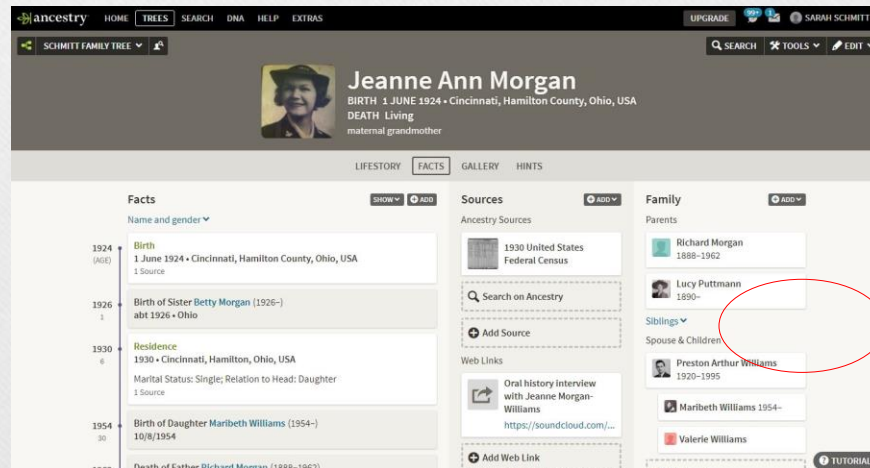
*The Veterans History Project collects and preserves personal stories and other original materials from America's war veterans.*

The Kentucky Oral History Commission

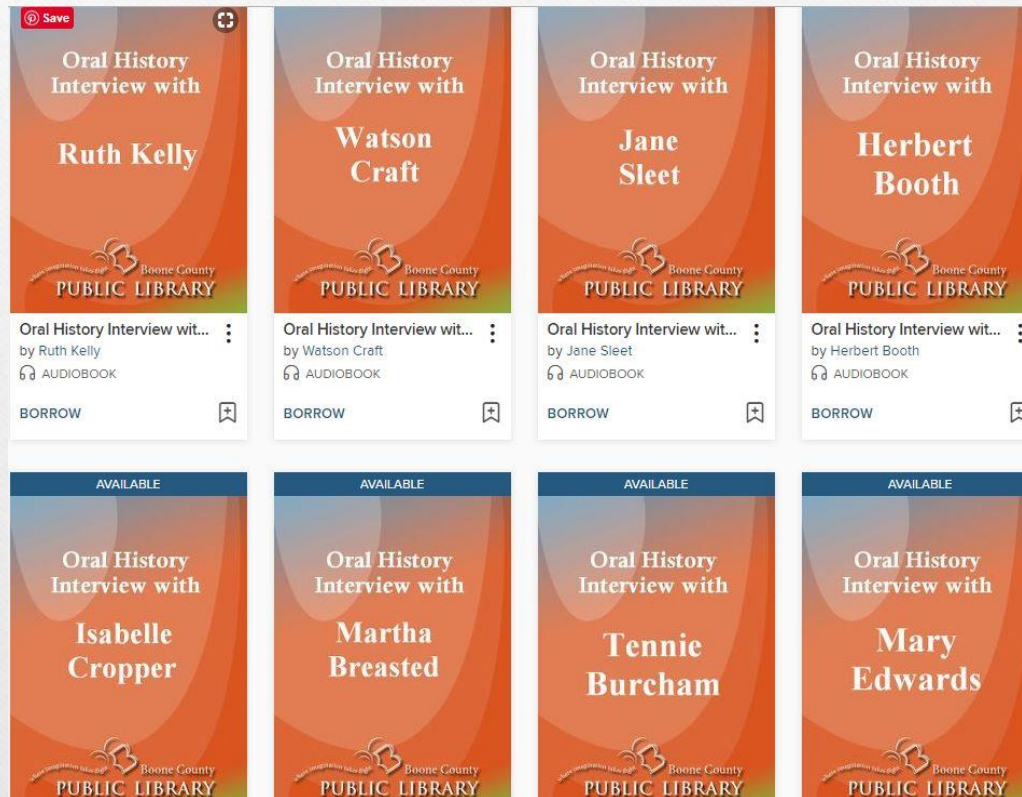
Women in Politics and Government  
Oral History Interview Collecting Initiative  
FIELD GUIDE



# Ways to Share



# Ways to Share



*Kentucky*  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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