



## **Shiloh Museum of Ozark History Interviewer Tips & Instructions**

### **Before the Interview**

- Work with the Museum to develop and confirm a list of suitable oral history interviewees
- Do research on your subject and areas for discussion in the interview.
- Develop a rough outline of the interview topics and some generic questions to ask.
- If possible, find a map of the area(s) that may be covered in the interview for reference when conducting the interview.
- Test out your equipment to make sure everything works; do a voice test; pack extra batteries just in case.
- Plan to interview only one person at a time; it makes it easier for everyone involved, including the transcriber of the interview.
- Call or email the interviewee to verify your appointment a day or two before the scheduled interview. Mention that you'd like to audio-record the interview and answer any questions that might arise.
- Make sure you have an interview information form and a release form, with extra copies, for each interview, as well as several copies of a Museum loan form.
- Choose casual but neat clothing.

### **Meeting the Interviewee**

- Be on time.
- Introduce yourself.
- Discuss the reason(s) for your interview.
- Review the release form with the interviewee and explain the use options; say you'll sign it after the interview so the interviewee can decide on its use based on what was said.
- Briefly describe the oral history program and the Shiloh Museum.
- Discuss approximately how long you'd like the interview to last. Especially for older interviewees, an hour-long interview may be the tail end of what they're able to do. If the interview goes longer and you have more to discuss, make plans to come back a second time.
- Agree on a quiet place for the interview; consider turning off cell phones or land lines, sequestering animals, moving to a room no one else is in, and closing doors or windows that let in outside noise.
- If helpful, ask for a glass of water for the interviewer and/or interviewee
- Remind the interviewee that you're going to record the interview, and double-check on her/his permission. If permission is not given, take very detailed notes.
- Place the recorder between you and the interviewee. If you're using only one microphone, place it closer to the interviewee.

### **During the Interview**

- Attempt to create and maintain a relaxed atmosphere.
- Begin by stating your name, the date, the interviewee's name, and where you're doing the recording. Then ask the interviewee to introduce her/himself and to spell her/his name if it's not obvious.

- Ask open-ended questions, ones that can't be answered by a simple yes or no. E.g., "Tell me about your experiences with Vance Randolph?" rather than "Did you know Vance Randolph?"
- Ask easy questions first, such as brief biographical queries. Ask very personal or emotionally demanding questions after a rapport has developed with the interviewee.
- Where appropriate, ask for dates or timeframes and specific names. Always ask for spellings if the names aren't familiar to you.
- Don't be so stuck on your predetermined questions that you can't explore another vein if the interviewee discusses something of importance or interest to your purpose.
- If you're recording the interview, you still need to take skeletal notes to help guide you to other questions, to get spellings of names or places, or to remind you of other topics that may have arisen during the interview. These notes can be taken on the reverse of the interview information form.
- If you don't understand something the interviewee says, ask her/him to repeat or clarify it. This is especially important for the transcriber.
- If the interviewee shows reservations about discussing something, remind her/him that she/he has the ability to limit the use of the interview, or portions of it. However, if she/he still has reservations about saying something, don't push it.
- Practice good listening techniques during the interview: lean in toward the interviewee, nod and smile as you listen, keep your eyes on the interviewee except when jotting down notes, avoid yawning or being distracted, don't check your watch except to ascertain the interview length, and don't be afraid to allow silence as the interviewee gathers her/his thoughts or determines what or how to say something.
- Practice good speaking skills: don't talk over the interviewee, speak clearly and not too fast, don't use jargon. If necessary, use verbal encouragement such as "How interesting" Be careful, however, not to pepper the interview with verbal encouragement such as "uh-huh," said at the same time that the interviewee is speaking. And remember that it's okay to laugh or show emotion when it's appropriate and as long as it doesn't interfere with the interview.
- Ask one question at a time.
- Ask for specific examples if the interviewee makes a general statement and you need to know more. Or you might say, "I don't understand. Could you explain that in more detail?"
- Remember that this is an audio, not video, recording, so you need to audibly describe whatever the interviewee points out or refers to in gestures.
- At the end, ask the interviewee if there's anything she/he wants to say that you haven't already asked about.

### **At the End of the Interview**

- Ask to see any photos that may be connected to the interview. If there are some photos (or other related documents), ask if the interviewee is willing to loan them to the museum for duplication and then return. If so, use a collections loan form and make sure that the information is complete and it's signed by the interviewee. Then make arrangements for when and how the loaned materials will be returned.
- Once again, review the release form with the interviewee, explain the use options, and ask her/him to complete and sign the form. You should sign the form at this time as well. Let the interviewee know that, after the Museum director signs the form, a copy will be returned to her/him.
- Double check the spelling of names and places.

- Determine whether another interview is warranted and, if so, schedule it if possible.
- Be sure to thank the interviewee.

### **After the Interview**

- Make detailed notes about the interview, including questions or topics for a follow-up interview, if warranted. The interviewer's notes help the transcriber or future scholars to understand the interview.
- Label all recordings immediately.
- Analyze the interview. Verify facts, where possible. Determine if you got what you needed from the interview. If not, or if further questions arise from your analysis, make arrangements to either call the interviewee to answer the questions by phone (if there are just a couple of questions) or to go back for a follow-up interview.
- Make one copy of the recording.
- Turn in any loaned photos or other documents, as well as the signed loan form, to the Museum immediately, along with the copy of the interview.
- Make arrangements for the interview to be transcribed. A duplicate of the transcription should be turned in immediately to the Museum.
- Write a thank-you note to the interviewee and, if warranted, ask the Museum director to write a thank-you note as well.
- Be sure to follow up on the return of any loaned materials.

## **Forms**

### **Interview Information Form**

- is used by the interviewer to set up the interview, make notes during the interview, and transfer information to the Museum
- contains contact and interview information on the front
- contains more specific information on the reverse which may or may not be collected, depending on the nature and topic of the interview

### **Release Form**

- makes it clear to the interviewee how the interviews will be used, minimizing the chances for misunderstanding.
- reminds the interviewer that the interviewee grants the privilege of using something that doesn't belong to the interviewer.
- includes: the interviewee's name, signature, signing date, and contact information; a statement of permission transferring the rights for the interview from the interviewee to the Museum (which may or may not be amended by the interviewee); the interviewer's name, signature, signing date, and contact information; and the signature of the Museum director and the signing date.

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