ARCHIVES MANUAL FOR LOCAL ARCHIVES

AND

PUBLIC LIBRARIES

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY
July 2004

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

No matter how small, a local history collection needs certain organizational foundations in order to function successfully. Whether such a collection is managed by a historical society, a local library, a local government office, or a museum, the basic principles for its management remain the same. The organization or agency in charge of the collection has multiple responsibilities, including acquiring appropriate materials, preserving them, and making them available to the public.

This manual attempts to assist local organizations by providing information about each of these responsibilities. Topics covered in the manual include developing mission statements and collecting policies; accessioning records and artifacts into the collection; developing an appropriate system of physical and intellectual control over items in the collection; and providing reference services to the public.

Because of the range of subjects covered, the information for each is provided on a fairly basic, introductory level. For more in-depth coverage of the topics, a list of helpful websites, and a bibliography are provided at the back of the manual, along with sample forms and policies.

CREATING A MISSION STATEMENT AND A COLLECTING POLICY

Mission Statements

Every local history organization or agency needs a mission statement to guide its activities. Such a statement is a brief description of what the organization sees as the reason it exists and the goals it serves. A mission statement can be very broad, but it should clearly state the overall purpose of the organization. It should state who you are, whom you serve, what you do, and what makes you different from everybody else. The language in the mission statement should be simple, concise, and direct.

The following is an example of a mission statement: "The Jones County Historical Society, founded in 1990, is a tax-exempt, non-profit corporation whose mission is to document the history of Jones County, Alabama, by collecting, preserving, and providing access to its historical records, photographs, and artifacts; to foster research; and to educate the public through our archives and museum." The mission statement of the Alabama Department of Archives and History is even briefer: "We tell the story of the people of Alabama . . . by preserving records and artifacts of historic value and promoting a better understanding of Alabama's history."

The mission statement provides a framework for the organization. It is a planning tool that can assist in defining the organization's goals and in eliminating plans or activities that do not support its mission. It does not, however, state specific goals and solutions but allows them to be developed within the context of the organization's mission.

Collecting Policies

A written collecting policy is a fundamental tool for the efficient functioning of a repository. As a blueprint for the acquisition of records and artifacts, a collecting policy will focus the repository's energy on what it truly wishes to acquire and allows it to refuse potential donations that do not fit within its scope. A written policy guards against a haphazard and disorganized collection by helping to make decisions about acquisition ahead of time. Without a collecting policy, a repository will always be passively reacting to the offers and demands of donors rather than actively pursuing the items and collections it desires. Lack of a collecting policy also contributes, over time, to the accumulation of a large backlog of unprocessed materials that do not necessarily fit the mission of the repository.

A collecting policy will also help the organization avoid duplicating materials held in another collection. No repository can collect everything relating to the history of a locality. It is wise to know the strengths in the collections of other repositories in the same area and not to attempt to duplicate their materials or to actively collect the same types of records. Cooperation rather than competition promotes the most complete documentation of the history of a locality.

Note: developing a collecting policy requires the input and advice of the repository and management staff as well as of governing boards. Many repositories establish an acquisitions committee to formulate the collecting policy and later to make decisions about offered donations based on the policy.

Steps in Creating a Collecting Policy

- Review your mission statement. It will provide you with some general guidelines about the intended focus of your collections.

- Define the geographical area your collection will document. Will it concentrate on one city, or will it include an entire county? Will surrounding areas be included, even if they are not in the same county? Will you collect within your entire region? A clear decision needs to be made about the geographical boundaries of the collection.

- Review your existing collections. If strong points already exist, such as, for example, a large collection of local photographs or a number of records relating to prominent families of the locality, you may want to focus your efforts on expanding in these areas. On the other hand, a review of your collections may indicate areas that are sparsely documented and that should be strengthened.

- Decide what types of formats will be included in your collection. Will it include paper records only, or will you collect photographs, architectural drawings, works of art, videotapes and audiotapes, computer records, and artifacts? Different types of records and artifacts may have widely differing storage and preservation requirements. Be realistic about what your facility can comfortably care for and make accessible. Collections that require extensive processing may not be practical in terms of the supplies and staff time required to make them usable.

- Define the most common user groups for your collection. If most of your users are genealogists, the collection should focus on records that document the history of families in the locality. If you expect the majority of your users to be serious historical researchers, the collection might focus more on local politics and business. You do not have to rule out or exclude certain types of users in developing your policy, but identifying your most common user groups helps to define the areas in which you will actively collect.

Remember that a collection policy, once formulated, can be changed as the repository itself changes or takes new directions. You should review the policy on a regular basis, perhaps annually, and update it as necessary. It should be an active document that is used on a regular basis, not one that is created and then forgotten.

- **Establish priorities.** Once the areas in which you wish to actively collect have been established, decide which ones are the most important or need attention right away. For example, if you decide to collect oral histories and have identified certain subjects to be interviewed, you may choose to start with the subjects who are currently elderly or about to move from the locality. This step is sometimes referred to as an acquisitions plan.

  After you have established priorities for active collecting, decide which types of records will be accepted if offered. For example, you may not be actively pursuing the records of civic organizations, but if such records are donated, they will be accepted.

  Finally, decide what types of records and artifacts you will not accept if offered, and include a listing of them in the policy. You may decide not to accept artifacts that, although possibly valuable or historic, are unrelated to your locality or collection. If items are in poor condition, it may not be feasible to spend money and scarce staff time to restore them. If the collection already contains certain records or items, there is no reason to accept duplicates of them from another donor. Be very careful about accepting items or records which are donated with access restrictions attached. If the potential donor stipulates that the materials being donated may not be seen by the public for a significant length of time, then your collection will not benefit from housing them. Copyright restrictions imposed by the donor may also be a problem. Be sure to get legal advice before accepting donations with access or copyright restrictions. A collecting policy allows the organization to refuse donations with the explanation that the items or records offered do not fit into the established policy. This avoids hurting feelings and offending donors who may have other materials you would like to collect.

  Be realistic about your organization's limitations. Do not, for example, accept computer records if your facility does not have the equipment to make them accessible or adequate funding to continue migrating the records as technology changes. Do not accept valuable works of art, if your facility cannot afford to provide adequate security arrangements for them.

- **Decide on a procedure to remove unwanted items from the collection.** Changes occur over time that render some materials no longer relevant or useful for the collection. A written procedure for deaccessioning these materials should be part of a collecting policy.

You may decide to offer them first to the original donor, if this individual can be found, or to another institution whose collecting policy lists the items as one they want, or to another local organization. Finally, some organizations sell deaccessioned materials from their collections, but you should take care to handle this procedure diplomatically.

- **Be sure to put the collection policy on the repository's website.** This will help encourage donations by informing the public of the subjects you are particularly interested in documenting.

ACCESSIONING

The process of transferring legal and physical custody of records and artifacts from the donor to the organization or agency is known as accessioning. This process involves the donor signing an agreement or deed of gift, giving ownership of the materials being donated to the repository. There are several considerations to address at the time the deed of gift is created and signed.

- Make sure that the donor has clear title to the materials being donated or has the authority to donate the materials.

- Try to obtain as much information as you can about the materials' provenance, that is, when it was created and by whom, other previous owners of the materials, and how the donor acquired them.

- Make sure the donor does not place unnecessary, overly long, or open-ended restrictions on access to the materials.

- Do not allow the donor to make restrictive stipulations about how the materials should be displayed, used, stored, or catalogued. You should inform donors that in order to preserve the donated materials, they may be re-organized and re-boxed, and pictures may be removed from frames. Donors should also understand that collections may be weeded to remove duplicates and unrelated materials. Artifacts may need preservation work.

Some repositories ask potential donors to fill out a pre-accession form describing the types of materials they wish to donate. This form can then be reviewed by the repository's archivist/curator or acquisitions committee to determine whether or not the materials fall within the guidelines of the collection policy. You may also decide to develop a brochure for potential donors that explains the repository's collecting goals and its process for reviewing potential donations.

Deeds of Gift

Many repositories develop a standardized deed of gift form to transfer the legal title to donated records from the donor to the repository (a sample form is included in the appendix). Certain museum and archives software packages such as PastPerfect, include a deed of gift form that is generated automatically when an accession is logged in. The form can usually be adapted to meet an organization's particular needs. A deed of gift should contain the following information:

- **Donor information.** The information about the donor includes name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address. If the donor is a business or institution, be sure to note that fact and to record information about a contact person.

- **Name of new owner.** This is the name of your repository or organization.

- **Description of materials being donated.** In addition to a brief listing of the materials donated, this should include basic information about their provenance, the approximate dates covered by the materials, and their volume.

- **Copyright.** If the donor holds a copyright to all or part of the materials, it should be assigned to the repository at the same time legal and physical custody is transferred. If the donor refuses to transfer the copyright, even at some future designated date, it is probably best to refuse the donation, as endless complications can arise, and the repository is essentially only offering free storage to the donor without being able to use the materials to its benefit or the public's. If the copyright is to be transferred in the future, the date of transfer should be noted in the deed of gift.

- **Disposal of unwanted items (optional).** You may want to specify in the deed of gift how unwanted items will be disposed of (i.e., returned to the owner, given to a more suitable repository, thrown away).

- **Signatures.** The deed of gift should be signed and dated by both the donor and the representative of the repository who is authorized to receive custody of donations.

At the same time that the deed of gift is signed by the donor and the repository representative, an accession number should be assigned to the donation. All materials included in the accession should have a single accession number. Most repositories assign numbers based on the year the donation was accessioned, i.e., 2002.001, 2002.002, etc. If accretions to the accession are received during the same year, they can be designated by 2002.001A, 2002.002B., etc., or they may be given a separate number.

Deposit Agreements

In some cases local government agencies may decide to transfer some of their historical records to a repository that can provide better storage conditions and accessibility for the records. If your repository can meet requirements for archival storage and has the space and staff to make the records accessible to the public, accepting these records into your collection can benefit the local government agency, the repository, and the public. The document by which such records are transferred is called a deposit agreement. It is essentially a contract between the local government agency and the repository. It differs from a deed of gift in that legal custody remains with the local government agency. The repository assumes physical custody of the records and provides access to the public. The deposit agreement is renewable. The Local Government Records Commission supervises the agreement and monitors conditions under which the local government records are stored. For more information on deposit agreements and a sample agreement, see the publication "Procedures for Implementing a Local Government Records Deposit Agreement" available on the ADAH web site, www.archives.state.al.us/slo.html.

Deaccessioning

If your collection policy contains a statement about the conditions under which items may be removed from your collections, the statement can act as a guideline for de-accessioning unwanted items or materials. A routine review of your holdings may reveal items that do not fit within the scope of your policy or are duplicates. In this case, you should not continue to maintain them. A written record should be kept for each item or group of items that is de-accessioned. It should include a listing of the materials, reasons for de-accessioning them, and information about the disposition of the materials. In general, the decision to remove materials from your collection should be made in consultation with the board of directors and/or the acquisitions committee of your repository.

PROCESSING ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

Once you have accessioned materials, the next step is to process them so that they are available for public use. Processing involves arranging the materials and describing them so that they can be easily located and used. The repository will need to have a separate, secure area for processing, where there is room to work and materials can be left undisturbed over the period of time required to complete the project. Often, particularly with private (as opposed to government or business) materials, processing can present quite a challenge. Materials will arrive in a variety of different types of boxes, within which there will be no discernible order. Arranging means identifying the various types of materials and imposing order by grouping like materials together. If, however, the materials arrive grouped in a recognizable order established by the creator, it is usually preferable not to disturb it. One of the primary principles of archival practice is the maintenance of the *original order* imposed by the creator. To arrange archival materials, paper records in particular, the following steps are useful:

- **Set priorities.** Most repositories maintain a backlog of accessioned but unprocessed materials. Collections need to be prioritized for processing based on several criteria that support the repository's collecting policy as well as practical considerations. Materials designated in the collecting policy as having top priority and those of particular interest to the repository's users should be processed before materials of secondary interest. Materials that are in relatively good order and can be processed and made available to the public without intensive labor should be processed before disorganized collections that will require a great deal of staff time.

  One decision the repository must make is the level of processing (i.e., record series, folder item) that will be used in its collections. Most repositories process at the records series level because they lack staff to create more detailed descriptions. If your repository houses an important local collection that is frequently used, you may want to consider processing it at the folder level. Processing beyond the records series level can be very time-consuming, and even if you plan to do more detailed processing eventually, such a project can be postponed until more pressing work is completed. If you believe detailed processing is necessary for an important collection, a knowledgeable volunteer could be assigned to the project, which would include creating a folder listing or even noting significant individual items in a folder.

- **Determine the provenance of the materials.** In general, processing of archival materials is carried out based on their provenance, or origin. Determining provenance may sometimes require quite a bit of effort. The donor of the materials may or may not be their creator. If not, take time to find out who, or what institution, was responsible for creating the materials. For example, a collection of Kiwanis Club materials may be donated by one of its members. In this case, the Kiwanis Club would be considered the creator, and the materials would be processed under its name, along with other Kiwanis Club materials received from others donors. It is not necessary, however, for all the materials in a collection to be physically located together in the repository, since they can be located by using an index or inventory.

- **Determine the materials' organization.** Look in each box and make a list of the different types of records and items it contains. You should soon start to perceive different groups of records. In a collection of personal records, for example, you might find photographs, diaries, scrapbooks, and correspondence. In materials donated by a business, you are likely to see correspondence, board meeting minutes, publications, legal files, bylaws, stockholder records, and financial records. Each of these types of records is called a *records series.* Nontextual or nonstandardized materials such as maps, blueprints, and photographs can be removed from the collection at this point and stored separately, depending on their particular needs. If such materials are removed, be sure to include a note with the other materials indicating what has been placed elsewhere.

- **Arrange the records.** Once you have identified the various records series in the collection, group all similar records together if they are not in a discernible original order. The records will be physically maintained together in these groups or series. The records series will serve as the basis for identifying the records so that they can be easily located and retrieved for reference purposes. The records can then be placed in file folders and labeled according to the title of the series, for example:

  Edwards Family Collection - Correspondence - 1939-45

  When you are grouping records into series, a good rule is to do the easy work first. Some record series will be easy to identify. Try not to give in to the temptation to label a group of records as "miscellaneous." A "miscellaneous" designation for records is not helpful for either the repository or the user. Try to come up with a specific title for the records even if you have to set them aside and come back to them at the end of the project.

  The following list gives examples of common types of records series:

Accounts	Invitations	Organizational Charts
Affidavits	Journals	Postcards
Agendas	Ledgers	Press Releases
Awards	Legal Papers	Programs
Bulletins	Manuals	Rosters
Certificates	Manuscripts	Scrapbooks
Clippings	Memoranda	Speeches
Correspondence	Minutes	
Diaries	Newsletters	
Financial Records	Notebooks	

- **Re-house the records.** Once records have been grouped into series, it is time to attend to the physical condition and storage of the records. Basically this means flattening folded paper records and placing them in acid-free file folders and boxes and securing other materials in an appropriate environment. At the same time, metal fasteners, rubber bands, and duplicate materials are removed. This is the time to make note of records that require additional preservation procedures, such as encapsulation, cleaning, or humidification. For more information on the physical processing of records, refer to the ADAH publication, "Care and Handling of Archival Materials."

  Before placing your file folders in boxes, you should decide on some logical order for them, e.g., chronological, alphabetical, if there is not already an order established by the creator. The creator's organization of the records should generally be maintained, if it exists and is readily comprehensible. Folders then go into acid-free cartons, with the size of the carton depending on the number of folders in the series.

- **Describe the records**. Description of your records means establishing intellectual control over them so that a user can determine what records the repository holds and obtain identifying information about them. Once the user has determined which records s/he wishes to see, repository staff can easily locate and retrieve them. Information concerning records in the repository is obtained through a system of *finding aids*, which may include lists or indexes. For example, a repository may create a list of all probate court records series in its collection. Such a list should include identifying information (creator, title, dates, volume) and a summary description of the contents of each record series, and location information. Commercial software, such as PastPerfect, allows you to create finding aids to your collection electronically. For some small local history collections, it may work to print out your finding aids and house them in notebooks that can be easily accessed and updated, but electronic finding aids make access to your collection's records much faster and easier.

- **Record description standards.** Description standards may be a complicated issue for a small repository, and you may decide not to use them. Such standards have been developed to attempt to achieve consistency in records description and to facilitate sharing of collection information both internally and externally. You should be aware of the following standards for archival description:

Machine Readable Cataloguing (MARC). This standard defines information fields and field data type for all types of records, including books, film, or artifacts, and establishes a protocol for each.

Encoded Archival Description (EAD). EAD applies to inventories and registers. It is compliant with Extensible Markup Language (XML), and the format can be used on a repository's website.

Controlled Vocabulary and Thesauri. These standards control the terminology used for describing information and allows searches to produce related information. Examples include *Archives, Personal Papers, and Manuscripts* by Steve Hensen and *Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules*.

The following is an example of a basic description of a family papers collection:

Harris Family

Collected papers (ca. 1915-1955)*

Family of George H. Harris (b. 1890), native of Montgomery County, founder of Harris Brothers Hardware Company, located in Montgomery.

Summary: Miscellaneous items of the Harris family including family photographs and letters; blueprints of the family home and the Harris Hardware Company building; newspaper clippings documenting the family's involvement in civic and social affairs; ledgers and inventories of the Harris Hardware Company.

*Note that this description is for the collection only. There are several separate records series represented in the collection. i.e., letters, blueprints, newspaper clippings, etc. If you wish to create a more detailed description, you may list each series separately.

PROVIDING REFERENCE SERVICES

Although providing reference services for archival materials is similar in many ways to providing library reference there are some differences. The most important is that archival materials are often unique, with just one copy in existence, whereas there are usually multiple copies of library materials available. There is, therefore, more need to take special care of archival materials and to provide security to prevent their loss.

Once the materials in a collection have been processed and the boxes are on the shelves, the collection is ready to be used by researchers. In archives, stacks are almost always closed to the public, and repository staff must provide access to the records. Expediting use of the records by researchers is the primary goal of reference services, but other considerations must also be taken into account, including security and continuing preservation of the records. It is a good idea to create a reference room policy, covering rules for use of the records, that is provided to researchers when they arrive. A sample policy from the ADAH reference room is included in the appendix to this manual.

- **Providing information about the repository's holdings.** Reference staff provide information about the collections held in the repository through the use of finding aids such as inventories, indexes, card catalogues, and databases. In order to assist users effectively, staff should be familiar with the repository's holdings and be able to locate material through the finding aids. Finding aids generally classify materials under their provenance or under their subject matter. In an archives, classification by provenance is more common. In this type of system, knowledgeable reference staff are important because they can link researcher requests based on subject matter to a collection that is classified by provenance. In other words, if a researcher requests materials on the subject of church architecture, the staff member might suggest a collection of the records of a particular local church whose architecture was notable or unusual.

- **Security of records.** There is a real possibility that users may carry off records from the repository unless certain precautions are observed. Every researcher should be required to register at the reference desk before being provided with any records or other materials. Information provided should include personal identifying information as well as the topic of research. Registration information is valuable not just for security purposes. It can also provide statistical information about the numbers and types of researchers the repository attracts. Patrons should not be allowed to bring brief cases, book bags, containers or large articles of clothing such as coats or jackets into the reference area. These may be checked in a separate area. No archival materials should be removed from the reference area, and patrons should be provided with a limited amount of research material at one time. The reference room policy could include a provision that patrons' belongings are subject to search when they leave the repository.

- **Care of records.** Archival records require careful handling during use to prevent deterioration. Policies excluding food, drink, chewing gum, and smoking in the reference area are common in records repositories. Pencils are safer than pens for taking notes. Your reference policy should encourage careful handling of the materials - turning pages carefully, not leaning or writing on paper on top of the materials, and not laying an open volume face down. Fragile materials require even more vigilance on the part of reference staff. You may decide to allow their use only under supervision.

- **Photocopying.** The repository should include rules about photocopying and scanning in its reference policy. In order to protect the materials, these procedures are usually performed for patrons by staff members. In some cases, the staff may refuse to allow the photocopying or scanning of fragile records and request that a written copy be made. Copying charges should be stated in the policy, as well as any limitations on the number of copies allowed per day.

- **Providing reference for non-paper materials.** Most local records repositories include microfilm in their collections, and some also include other non-paper materials, such as electronic records, audiotapes and videotapes. Researcher use of non-paper records requires special equipment, including microfilm reader printers, computers, cassette players, and video players. Since these types of equipment are expensive and sometime difficult to use, you should expect to provide at least initial assistance and supervision to researchers making use of them. It is also helpful to display instructions for operating the equipment next to the machines or to distribute instructions for viewing the records along with the record material itself.

PROVIDING OUTREACH FOR LOCAL COLLECTIONS

The ultimate goal of your local history collection is not just to acquire and preserve materials but also to encourage their use in the local community in order to further knowledge, understanding and appreciation of your community's history. Your collection can help to preserve the local character of the community and may assist local officials and citizens to address important needs and plan for the future of the community. Added benefits of developing outreach programs include increased public awareness of the value of the repository to the community and increased financial support.

Be sure to consider major user groups in developing outreach programs. Local schools should be one focus. By making contact with the local school board or individual teachers, you can acquaint them with the resources in your collection. A staff member or volunteer may visit school history and social studies classes to talk about local history, using archival records, artifacts, and other materials from your collection to supplement the presentation.

The possibilities for outreach activities are almost endless. Outreach events might include poster contests, presentations to local clubs, commemorations of significant local events, on-site or traveling exhibits that highlight strengths in the collection, open houses, tours, lecture and film series, essay contests, and conferences on issues or themes related to holdings. Outreach can also include publications such as brochures, promotional leaflets, press releases, and teacher packets. Consider also participating in cooperative efforts with other historical or educational facilities in the area.

COLLECTING ORAL HISTORIES

Gathering oral histories can be a way to build a diverse and interesting local history collection. Oral history provides a means of gathering a unique historical record., As with other sources, oral histories contain inherent weaknesses. Recollections alter with the passage of time, but recorded memories may capture emotions and thoughts which otherwise remain undocumented. Still, researchers often prefer using oral histories along with substantive related sources, such as photographs, diaries, business records, or administrative files.

Before conducting an oral history project, you must define its purpose. Will the interviews provide information about genealogy, characteristics of a region, a particular industry's work environment, lifestyles during a specific period, or an individual's political life? A local organization must determine if the project fits within its collection policy's scope before proceeding.

After deciding to conduct an oral history project, an organization must develop a list of potential interviewees who fit the project's criteria. For example, if a project's goal is to document area mill workers' daily regimen, a potential interviewee list would include workers as well as their dependents. Then, when ascertaining who to approach at the beginning of the undertaking, age and availability must be deciding factors, because of the hope of capturing those memories before they are forever lost.

Before conducting an interview, a meeting between the interviewer and interviewee is indispensable in order to cultivate the relationship which will allow the level of openness that is desirable in an oral history; however, in that encounter, do not allow the interviewee to tell stories which you will want to capture on tape during the interview, because seldom will that person go into as much detail the second time. Also, remember to call the day before the interview as a reminder of your meeting.

Determining where and how to conduct the interview will be a deciding factor in your recording's quality. A neutral place, such as a library meeting room, is ideal. Choose a location with a minimum of background noise, not even a single unit air conditioner. Block out a session of time which will be uninterrupted. If conducting the interview at the individual's home, politely ask that the telephone be unplugged for your session. Also consider grandfather clocks which may chime with the changing hour. The interview flows better when conducted with only one person. If both a husband and wife would like to be interviewed, suggest doing two separate interviews to decrease interruptions and to provide for a better oral history. Offer to provide the spouse with a copy of the interview. A quiet impartial environment with only one interviewee provides a recording with superior presentation qualities.

An interview must be recorded to capture information which would not be included in notes. Even tone and dialogue are important aspects of oral history. Recommendations on what types of technology to use in recording an interview are numerous. If the goal is to use recordings for radio, equipment will be more expensive. For most local history organizations, a $100 tape recorder from a local electronics store with an external microphone will be sufficient. No matter what caliber tape or digital recorder you use, the most important aspect is the inclusion of an outside microphone which can be attached to the recorder. The most unobtrusive microphones are those which may be clipped on the interviewee's lapel. The interviewer must test the equipment before use and bring extra batteries for the microphone and an extension cord for the recorder to reach outlets. Do not use tapes lasting more than 60 minutes, because longer tapes are stretched out and will be more likely to break. Leave a few seconds at the beginning of the tape to ensure it is recording and include a brief introduction. One example would be "Today is *Date.* This is *Name,* and I am interviewing *Name* at *Location.* We will be focusing on *topic of interview.*" Then, a short thirty-second response from the interviewee should be recorded and played back to determine that no adjustments need to be made to hear both voices adequately.

Preferably before or immediately after the interview, a release form must be signed in order for the interview to be used for research. The interviewer and interviewee must provide consent and transfer ownership to the institution that will be housing the oral history. Local history organizations may want to review consent forms from the Library of Congress website. (http://www.loc.gov/) One example provided by this site states: "Thank you for participating in the (institution's name and project name) project. By signing this form below, you give your permission to include any tapes and/or photographs made during the (project name) in a public archive where they will be available to researchers and the public for scholarly and educational purposes including publications and exhibitions."

Solid interviews require extensive preparation. The interviewer should conduct background research to obtain knowledge about the topic or the interviewee. An interviewee will be more willing to share additional information with someone who asks intelligent questions. For example, if you were examining Polish-American lifestyles, asking about the intricacies of their Christmas tradition or the prevalence of Polish-American bands could trigger memories which would otherwise have passed without comment. If you were interviewing a former mill worker, a basic knowledge of the different positions at a mill could draw out additional information since the interviewee would appreciate your understanding of the background detail.

Develop a list which could be used during the interview. Although an interviewer needs to allow an oral history to follow its own course, outlines provide guidance during the interview. When possible, an interviewer should already have dates written down. In general, interviewees should not be relied on for specific time frames. For example, asking when a particular event happened may fluster an individual who cannot remember the exact year. A better question would be, "Mill records indicate that a strike occurred in 1937, will you tell me about your involvement or lack of participation in that movement?" Questions should be open ended and non-biased, so as not to influence the answer of the interviewee. A biased question would be "Wasn't your boss discriminatory against women?" A more appropriate question is "How did your boss supervise women who worked at the mill?" Interviewees usually will provide as much or as little information as is asked of them, so be sure to formulate questions which require more than a yes or no answer. Your questions are pivotal to a quality interview.

The significance of asking informed questions has been highlighted; however, the process of asking questions will impact your oral history's quality. You want to ease into the interview. Sometimes, props such as photograph albums are useful to spark memory. One way of making the interviewee feel comfortable is by beginning with some questions about biographical information, before getting into the focus of the interview. The interviewee will relax as the session develops, so save more difficult issues for later. Other tips seem obvious but need to be remembered. Never ask more than one question at a time, never interrupt, and do not be afraid of silences to allow time for the interviewee to proceed to the next thought. If an interviewee touches on a point about which you would like to ask, write it down, so that you will not forget to ask about it later. Also, make notes of any special words or names which you may have never heard so that you can check them with the interviewee before leaving the session. Have a set amount of time for the session and end at an appropriate point. Another time may be set up to continue the interview so as not to overburden the interviewee.

Make a checklist of items that need to be covered during and after the interview. Before leaving, check the spellings of any names and make sure the tapes are labeled. Upon returning to the institution, make a copy of the tape for use and a copy to send to the interviewee. A follow up letter should be sent to express thanks for contributing to your project. An information sheet needs to be created to provide basic information about the interview including the date, place, and length of interview, names of interviewer and interviewee, biography of interviewee, significance of interview, relationship between interviewee and the interviewer, and interviewer's comments (see Appendix).

When deciding to conduct an oral history project, an institution must think about the preservation of those recordings. The original should not be used. Instead, a master copy needs to be made from the original, from which all other copies should be made. That original should then be preserved in a separate, secure, dry environment, with a stable, cool temperature.

Interviews should be transcribed if at all possible because of the fragility of the recording medium. Only copies should be used for transcription, because it will wear out the tape. Word for word transcriptions are advised because it better captures the nature of the conversation. Spelling words as they were articulated will help capture the dialect of that individual. After completion, each transcription should be printed on acid free paper. A copy may then be made for use. An alterative to a complete transcription would be an index which lists major subjects and the location of those subjects on the tape, but transcription is highly recommended (See Appendix for sample transcribed interview page).

An oral history collection can be a valuable asset to any local organization if the interviews coincide with the organization's mission. Extensive preparation will ensure the collection's quality. Be sure to conduct background research, develop a basic outline, hold a preliminary visit, record on no more than 60 minute tapes in a quiet environment using an external microphone for the recorder, remember basic interview techniques, obtain a signed release form, ensure the preservation of the recording, and transcribe the interview for future researchers.

HELPFUL WEBSITES

The chapters in this manual provide basic information in a brief, nontechnical format. For more detailed information on any of the topics included in the manual, the following websites may be useful:

General:

Alabama Department of Archives and History: www.archives.state.al.us

Society of Alabama Archivsts (SALA): www.auburn.edu/sala/

Society of American Archivists (SAA): www.archivists.org

American Association for State and Local History: www.aaslh.org

Developing a Mission Statement:

Peter F. Drucker Foundation for Nonprofit Management: www.pfdf.org/leaderbooks/sat/mission.html

For a mission statement case study: www.facilitators.com/developing_a_mission_statement.htm

Developing a Collecting Policy:

Wisconsin Historical Records Advisory Board, "Creating a Collection Development Policy for Local Historical Records in Public Libraries": www.shsw.wisc.edu/archives/whrab/wapl.pdf

Preserving Archival Materials and Disaster Planning:

Northeast Document Conservation Center: www.nedcc.org

Preservation of paper materials: http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/

Processing Collections:

Introduction to Archival Organization and Description: Access to Cultural History (includes an excellent tutorial for processing a collection): www.schistory.org/getty/

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cox, Richard. *Documenting Localities.* Chicago: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1996.

Phillips, Faye. *Local History Collections in Libraries.* Libraries Unlimited, Inc., 1995.

Yakel, Elizabeth. *Starting an Archives.* Chicago: Society of American Archivists and Scarecrow Press, 1994.

SAA Basic Manuals Series:

Bellardo, Lewis, and Bellardo, Lynn Lady. *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers.* Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992.

Ham, F. Gerald. *Selecting and Appraising Archives and Manuscripts.* Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992.

Miller, Fredric M. *Arranging and Describing Archives and Manuscripts.* Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990.

O'Toole, James M. *Understanding Archives and Manuscripts.* Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1990.

Pugh, Mary Jo. *Providing Reference Services for Archives and Manuscripts.* Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1992.

Ritzenthaler, Mary Lynn. *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts.* Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993.

Wilsted, Thomas, and Nolte, William. *Managing Archival and Manuscript Repositories.* Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1991.