



IDAHO ORAL HISTORY CENTER IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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office hours: 8:00-5:00, Monday-Friday
public hours: 9:00-5:00, Tuesday-Saturday

What are oral history interviews?

Oral history interviews are tape-recorded (both audio and video) interviews with individuals who have first-hand knowledge about a variety of topics. Some interviews are biographical, that is, about an individual's own life. Others concern the narrator's knowledge about a specific topic or event and are often limited to very short time span.

How long has oral history been in existence?

The practice of telling a story, rather than writing it has, of course, been around for thousands of years. Oral history, as a discipline, has only been in existence since the late 1940s and the development of the tape recorder.

How can oral history benefit genealogy research?

Oral history collections are often overlooked in genealogical research. However, a researcher might find an oral history interview with a relative that could give fascinating and important details about that person's life and activities. Do keep in mind that oral history is only useful in documenting events and individuals from the last half of the nineteenth century to the present.

What is the Idaho Oral History Center and what does it have in its collection?

The Idaho Oral History Center (IOHC) has been a program of the Idaho State Historical Society since 1978. It grew out of oral history projects which were undertaken in the 1970s by the Idaho Historical Auxiliary and the Idaho Bicentennial Commission. The IOHC continues to conduct oral history interviews on a variety of Idaho topics and also serves as a central repository for oral history projects in the state. Today, the collection includes interviews with some 2,000 individuals.

Most interviews in the IOHC collection deal with a specific topic or were conducted for a special project, such as: Boise Valley pioneers, life in Latah County prior to World War II, Civilian Conservation Corps experiences, Czechoslovakian culture in the Buhl-Castelford area, African-Americans in Southeast Idaho, eyewitnesses to the Teton Dam disaster, ranching in Owyhee County, and Teton Valley pioneers, just to name a few.

How can I learn more about oral history collections?

The IOHC recently produced A Directory of Oral History Collections in Idaho, available from the address listed above for \$6.00, plus \$2.00 shipping/handling. (Idaho residents must add 5% sales tax.) The IOHC collection is also listed on WIN LaserCat, a computer cataloging database available at over 500 libraries in the northwestern United States. Once an

interview is located within the IOHC collection, researchers can work with their local public library to request the interview (tape or transcript, if available) through Inter-Library Loan (ILL) services. (Researchers do need to be aware that the IOHC is one of few repositories that makes its oral history collection available through ILL.)

Oral history collections can be found at many other locations, including state and local historical societies, museums, public and private libraries, and colleges and universities. Many of these repositories have catalogued their oral history collection on a regional computer database and others have published or in-house guides to help the researcher find specific information.

For general information about oral history in the United States, an excellent source of information is the Oral History Association, P.O. Box 97234, Baylor University, Waco, Texas 76798-7234.

Email

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Page URL: <http://home.rmci.net/dyingst/oralhist.htm>

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