

# FAQs



Worcester Women's Oral History Project

## **Project Overview**

The Worcester Women's Oral History Project (WWHOP) is an initiative of the Worcester Women's History Project (WWHP). The co-chairs of WWHOP are Charlene Martin and Maureen Ryan Doyle. As of fall, 2018 the project has collected nearly 400 oral histories from women in Worcester County.

## **Interview Longevity and Use:**

Transcripts are made available online at <http://wwhp.org/Activities/Oral/>. Transcripts and oral history materials are archived at the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Radcliffe Institute at Harvard University. They will be used by scholars of all stripes, from those writing books on the region, to high school students writing term papers. The stories will be a treasured resource for our community for many years to come.

## **Who should I interview?**

The oral histories we collect are from women who were born, live and/or work in Worcester, or feel connected to Worcester in some way. There is no age requirement or limit and oral histories can be conducted with women of any age group who are "Worcester women". If your interviews take you out of Worcester proper, please feel free to share these stories with us as well. We are including interviews from women throughout Central Massachusetts in the archives.

You may consider interviewing family members for the project. We do not usually have these types of conversations with our family. The interview transcript can become a treasured family heirloom.

Interviews may be done in languages other than English, native to the interviewee, spoken or signed. Feel free to transcribe the interview in its original language, but please provide an English translation for our archives.

If you would like to take part in this exciting project, but do not have a woman to interview, please contact WWOHP at [info@wwhp.org](mailto:info@wwhp.org) and include "Oral History Project" in the subject line.

## **How do I get my organization involved?**

This project can be tailored to fit your organization's particular needs. You can train members of your organization using our online guides and materials. Our oral history consultants can speak to you on the phone about your project and visit your group if you wish. We also offer workshops. For questions and/or more information please contact us with questions and or for more information at [info@wwhp.org](mailto:info@wwhp.org) We maintain a list of local women as potential interviewees.

## **What equipment should I use?**

Due to their reliability, it is highly recommended that you use a tape recorder and ninety-minute tapes. Do not use a "voice activation" feature. You may also record on digital recorders, iPhones, or iPads.

## **What questions do I ask in an oral history?**

Please use the [Interview Guide](#) as a **guide ONLY**, adding or subtracting any questions if you like. Remember that an oral history is different than an interview. Please feel free to adapt the questions so they fit your interview. Go with the interviewee's choices for what the oral history will cover. You are working together to create the document. Both of you have a "shared authority" for what will be in the transcript. Yet, where applicable, let the interviewee's decision take precedence.

## **How long does an interview take?**

Generally, interview sessions should last 45 minutes to an hour. If you need to go longer, return to the interview on a different day.

## **Interviewing Tips:**

Ask open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a yes or no. Avoid asking leading questions. When interviewing, do not correct interviewees. If they make a mistake regarding dates or other factual material, you can ask them further questions if necessary, but do not correct them. Corrections make the interviewee feel ill at ease.

The best parts of an interview invariably occur after the tape recorder is turned off. If a conversation resumes, ask the interviewee if you can turn on the machine again, or add missed stories to the transcript in squared brackets [ ].

When interviewing deaf individuals who communicate with sign language, please use video recording. These interviews must also be transcribed for the WWOHP archives.

## **What forms do I need?**

Follow the oral history check list carefully. Be sure to fill out the [Informed Consent](#), [Deed of Gift](#), and [Bio](#) forms which are available on the web site. Be sure to provide WWOHP with both an electronic and hard copy of your transcript as well as a copy of all of the forms. If your interviewee chooses to remain anonymous, her informed consent and deed of gift forms must still be filled out with her legal name and signature.

## **How do I transcribe?**

It may be helpful to use a transcriber which may be available from the WWOHP. The transcriber helps you to keep your hands on the keyboard by allowing you to start, pause, and rewind with a foot pedal. It can also slow down the speed of the tape to better match your typing pace. You **do** need to transcribe the interview word for word, in most cases. No computer program is yet devised that can create a transcription of an oral history interview. The interviewer is the best person to create the transcription.

When transcribing, use the narrator's grammar but traditional spelling. For instance, do not write "cah" for "car" or "sittin'" for "sitting" to imply accent. You should transcribe "ain't" or other slang terms as said.

It is not necessary to transcribe every "umm" uttered by the narrator. Provide a good sense of their speech patterns, but clean up some stumbling if you wish. You want to be true to what was said without overwhelming the transcript with unreadable language.

Pauses are OK in an interview. Do turn off the tape recorder for phone calls if you can.

Anything you want to add to the transcript can be said within the squared brackets. You may want to indicate on the transcript if someone was joking or laughed or sighed.

See [Transcription Tips](#) document for more information.

## **What do I do when I am finished?**

Label tapes clearly with the interviewee's name, the date of the interview, and your name as the interviewer. Include a disk or CD with your electronic transcript and abstract. Please also include the informed consent, deed of gift, and bio forms. Review the [Post-Interview Checklist](#) in this Toolkit for project completion process. Students completing projects as part of a class assignment should submit all items on the checklist to their instructor. All others should contact WWOHP [info@wwhp.org](mailto:info@wwhp.org) to make arrangements for submission of materials.