FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

HMRC Oral History Collection

What is an oral history?
An oral history interview is a recorded dialogue between a trained interviewer and a person who has done or witnessed something historic or whose life experience adds to our understanding of history.

What is the HMRC Oral History Collection?
The Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC) Oral History Collection includes over 500 interviews that capture the varied perspectives and stories of people from all walks of life: politicians, teachers, police officers, business owners, activists, philanthropists, musicians, and so on. Our collections are part of the Houston Oral History Project which also includes the Mayor Bill White Collection (100 interviews commissioned by Mayor White) and Neighborhood Voices (over 60 interviews recorded at various library locations in 2008).

Does this include recordings that are not actual interviews?
Yes, the HMRC Oral History Collection includes interviews, radio broadcasts, speeches, memorial services, mayor’s news conferences, sermons, and political programs.

How are these accessible?
Our oral histories may be accessed via the Houston Area Digital Archive (http://digital.houstonlibrary.org) or by personally visiting HMRC in the Julia Ideson Building downtown. Some interview transcripts are available as PDFs. Please contact the HMRC reference desk at (832) 393-1662 to see if the transcript(s) in which you are interested can be delivered in PDF form.

Are there transcripts for all interviews?
No, not all interviews have transcripts. Interviews are placed in a queue for transcription to be done by volunteers, contract employees, and HMRC staff as time and funding permits.

How can I get a copy of an interview?
Please complete and submit a Reproduction and Permission to Publish form available on the HMRC website (http://www2.houstonlibrary.org/hmrc/) and in the Texas Room. The fee for reproductions/use is $15.00.

Can I use a whole interview or clip of an interview in an exhibit, film, or documentary project?
Permission will be granted based on the conditions of use listed on our Reproduction and Permission to Publish form available on the HMRC website (http://www2.houstonlibrary.org/hmrc/) and in the Texas Room. The fee for reproductions/use is $15.00.

How do I cite an interview used in my research?
There are a variety of citation styles available. We ask that all citations include, at minimum, the oral history identification number, name of interviewee, and “Houston Metropolitan Research Center.” See the sample below:

OH 123 Jerry Miller, Houston Metropolitan Research Center, interviewed on February 11, 1976
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW PROCESS

How is an interview conducted?
Once an interview is arranged the interviewer performs background research and develops a list of questions. The interview takes place in a quiet, comfortable setting agreed upon by both parties. Before the interview begins the interviewee is asked to sign an Oral History Release Form. The interview is recorded and then returned to the Houston Metropolitan Research Center (HMRC) for processing. Identifying information is added and the recording is uploaded to the Houston Area Digital Archive (HADA) website. The interview is then placed in a queue for transcription to be done by volunteers, contract employees, and HMRC staff as time and funding permit.

What is the Oral History Release Form? Why do I need to sign it?
The Oral History Release Form is a binding agreement stating that the interview is a gift to HMRC; that in making this gift there is a transfer of ownership to HMRC; and that the interview may be made available to the public. HMRC is unable to release the interview to the public for research purposes unless this form is signed.

Are the interviews filmed? Is this optional?
HMRC prefers to film every interview to capture facial expressions and gestures which can assist in a researcher’s understanding while making the story personal, emotive, and accessible to audiences. HMRC will use only an audio recorder should an interviewee prefer not to be on camera.

Where do the interviews take place?
HMRC staff can film the oral history in the Julia Ideson Building or any location of your choice as long as the space is private, quiet, and well lit. Please note that staff will also need access to an electrical outlet in the chosen space. Most of our recordings are conducted in the home of the interviewee.

Who records the interviews?
Usually the HMRC oral historian conducts the interview while another staff member records it. Sometimes a subject specialist conducts the interview.

Where are the interviews stored?
All digital copies of our interviews are housed on HADA (http://digital.houstonlibrary.org). All physical copies of our interviews (CDs, cassette tapes, reels, etc.) are housed in the closed stacks of HMRC located in the Julia Ideson Building.

Are the interviews transcribed?
Interviews are placed in a queue for transcription to be done by volunteers, contract employees, and HMRC staff as time and funding permits. We happily accept volunteers who are interested in transcribing interviews.

How do you select interviewees? Can I make a recommendation for a potential interview?
We love recommendations! HMRC is devoted to capturing the history of Houston. We will contact your recommendation to discuss their interest in our program and topics for discussion. Please contact HMRC’s reference desk at (832) 393-1662 in order to make a recommendation.