The Lost Newcastle Oral History Project is a community resource to gather social and cultural histories of the Hunter Region through digital oral history-audio/audio-visual recordings.

The Project was inspired by a similar programme undertaken by University of Newcastle that was part of the Open Foundation Course (1986-1989) - known as the Margaret Henry Oral History Archive held at Cultural Collections, University of Newcastle Library. This current project aims to revive stories of Newcastle, the Hunter Valley and its surrounds by recording voices that describe the Region’s cultural, intellectual and social life.

This post includes basic instructions on practice and methods of oral history, how to do an oral history interview, use of new technologies in recording historical information, as well as links to other resources. Also includes ethical practices of oral history (Guidelines, Copyright, Conditions of use). We also recommend Oral History NSW for advice and support.

The following covers some basic steps in conducting an oral history interview.

**STEP 1: WHO TO INTERVIEW**

You can choose someone who has an interesting story to tell about the Hunter Region. It could be a friend, relative and someone you know. The may talk about where they used to work, a family business, or a place they grew up, people they knew. Here are some other themes:


Also have a listen to some of the interviews from the 1980s- for ideas and inspiration - [Margaret Henry oral History Archive](#).
STEP 2: RESEARCH TIPS

When you have chosen someone to interview (and they have given consent), you can be guided by your initial contact during informal conversation about a topic that could be covered in an interview, it is also a good idea to ask them to complete a written Interviewee Information Sheet (Appendix 1) before the formal interview. When you are clear about a topic, it is a good idea to do some general background research. For example, if the person worked in a particular profession or industry you may want to explore this. It is important to have some general understanding of the topic of the interview so that you can formulate suitable questions. Many sources are available on-line, or you may consider contacting Family history and other Historical Groups (Appendix 2) for support with research. Cultural Collections at the UON has sources, including Flickr and WordPress. Local studies at the Newcastle Library also have historical material associated with the Hunter Region, as well as local libraries, museums and historical societies. Also look at Trove.

STEP 3: WHAT QUESTIONS TO ASK IN THE INTERVIEW

The following is a starting point in formulating questions, the more you know about a person before the interview, the more you can adapt questions to gain useful and valuable answers. Here are some Sample Outline of Questions (Appendix 3) you can use in an oral history interview. Revise these accordingly in line with a person’s specific interests and life experiences.

STEP 4: TIPS FOR CONDUCTING ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

How do I ask the questions? (Appendix 4)

In general, have a basic idea of the themes that will be covered- for example - Work history, growing up in a particularly suburb.

- Have your first question well planned
- Open rather than closed questions
- Remember silence is good
- Positive body language and being pleasant
- Give interviewee time to respond to question, don’t interrupt!
- Don’t be too worried if the interview goes off track
- Ask the Interviewee for specific examples
- Ask follow-up questions and then ask some more
STEP 5: 
ETHICAL PRACTICE- GRANTING PERMISSION

It is essential to liaise with the interviewee in an honest and respectful manner. Explain to them why you would like to conduct an interview, and allow them to discuss with you what they are happy to talk about, and what they prefer not to discuss. The interviewee always has a right to review, correct and/or withdraw anything in the interview- or decide to grant permission at all. They must be given this opportunity after the interview has been conducted. It is important to discuss Ethical Practices Guidelines (Appendix 5) the process and granting permission with the interviewee, here is a Sample Condition of Use Form (Appendix 6)

- It is the responsibility of the interviewer to protect the rights of interviewee
- Important to ensure objectivity, honesty and integrity

See further information about permissions. Participants must follow the Oral History Australia Guidelines of Ethical Practice 2007.

WHERE CAN RECORDINGS BE KEPT IN PERPETUITY?

Oral/audio-visual histories can be made digitally available on numerous social platforms- SoundCloud is probably the most popular and widely available. From these social platforms recordings can be embedded in blogs and other social media- new technology enhancing oral histories and digital humanities.

Cultural Collections of the University of Newcastle has agreed to store original audio or audio-visual file in perpetuity, to be made available on their various open source digital platforms (Permissions required). Audios will be made available to the community via the UONCC SoundCloud, UONCC WordPress and UONCC YouTube sites.

Recordings and permission forms can be sent to Cultural Collections at the University of Newcastle, email to archives@newcastle.edu.au

STEP 6: 
WHAT DEVICE(S) TO USE

Technology today enables us to easily record oral history interviews. It is up to you as to the device you want to use to record the interview. These may include:-

- Professional handheld devices are the best option and a good investment if you are serious about doing oral history recordings.
- Apps for Smartphones and devices - There are many downloadable voice recording Apps for personal devices (iPad, iPhone, androids etc.) Although these may seem simple to use, problems can occur attempting to transfer a recording from a smartphone.
Traditional cassette audio tapes - We do not suggest the use of older style cassette tapes, the sound quality is not optimal and cassettes are more difficult to digitise - the UON’s Cultural Collections can digitise cassette and analogue tapes, however is more complex process. Further information can be found [here](#). (Appendix 7)

**STEP 7: EDITING & TRANSCRIPTION AUDIO RECORDINGS**

Most audio digitally recorded can be edited using audio editing software, such as Audacity that is free and easy to use. It has cut, copy and paste functions, reduce noise, and convert file formats. Other professional audio editing software is Audition Adobe. Further information.

Making a summary or transcript of your recording is recommended as best practice. This will allow your interview to be more search-friendly when uploaded on the web, as well as providing clarity and better access for the hearing impaired. oTranscribe is a free online app for transcribing recorded interviews.

For further information contact Dr Ann Hardy, Historian, Creative Industries & Digital Humanities Projects Co-ordinator for Cultural Collections at the University of Newcastle, email ann.hardy@newcastle.edu.au, phone 49 215824 or 0438509139

**OTHER RESOURCES**

JD Somerville Oral History Collection - State Library of South Australia

Oral History and Folklore - National Library of Australia

Australian Generations Oral History Project - Monash University

By Word or Mouth - Conducting Oral Histories - A resource book for teachers and student, NSW.

A guide for interviewing veterans past and present - Australian War Memorial

Oral History - Records and Archives Office – UNSW

Oral History and Realia – National Library of Australia
Example of an Interviewee Information Sheet (Oral History Australia)

This information will greatly assist the process of an Oral History interview however please do not feel obliged to answer all questions.

1. Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms/Other

__________________________________________________________________________
Surname                                                  Christian Name

Maiden Name (if applicable) ___________________________________________________________________________

Present Address _______________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________ Postcode____

Telephone Number ____________________________________________________________________________________

Email _____________________________________________________________________________________________

Occupation/s ______________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Date and place of birth ____________________________

Names of brothers and sisters ______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________________________________

Mother’s maiden name ____________________________________________

Mother’s date and place of birth __________________________________________________________________

Father’s name _______________________________________________

Father’s date and place of birth ____________________________________

Mother’s occupation ___________________________________________

Father’s occupation ___________________________________________

3. Marital status: __________________  Date of marriage _______________________

Name of spouse _______________________________________________

Occupation of spouse ___________________________________________

Names of children _____________________________________________
4. Locality where you grew up __________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

5. Name of education institutions attended:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

6. Memberships (of Clubs, etc.)

(a) Present _____________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

(b) Past _____________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

7. Employment details

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

8. Community interests:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

8. Any other details of particular relevance ____________________________________________
APPENDIX 2
HISTORICAL GROUPS & SOCIETIES – HUNTER REGION

NEWCASTLE


HUNTER REGION


Muswellbrook Local & Family History Society  [https://www.mbkhistorical.org/](https://www.mbkhistorical.org/)


**LAKE MACQUARIE**


**PORT STEPHENS**


SAMPLE QUESTIONS

General questions to start the interview
- When and where were you born?
- Tell me about your parents or your family background
- Where was your family originally from?
- What did your parents do for a living?

About Family
- Do you have siblings and other family members?

About Community
- Describe where you grew up? Neighbourhood etc. What activities did you do as a child?
- Who were some prominent people in your community- who made an impact on you?

Friends and Interests
- Do you recall your friends at school? What were they like?
- What interests/hobbies/sport did you have?

Young Adult Years
- What was family life like in your teenage years?

Education
- What school did you attend, and can you tell me about your school life?
- Tell me about your favourite teacher
- What were your subjects? (liked/disliked)
- When you finished school did you work/study? Where?

Adult years
- Did you do further study? What career did you have?

(Questions could relate to occupation- technical questions, workplace culture, social aspects)

Overview
- How do you think the suburb you grew up has changed?
- How do you think your career/profession has changed since you first started in particular industry?
- What significant changes have you seen in social life of the Hunter/Newcastle?
Important questions you should ask your parents

1. What was your childhood like?
2. What were you like in high school?
3. How would your parents have described you?
4. When you think about a fork in the road in your life, what was it and why did you choose that particular path?
5. What happy memory will you cherish forever?
6. What was your second choice for my name?
7. What have you always wanted to tell me, but haven’t had the courage to?
8. Growing up, who inspired you the most?
9. If you had to do it all over again, would you pursue the same career path?
10. What is your biggest regret?
11. Best trip of your life?
12. What amazes you most about society nowadays?
13. What do you miss most about the ‘old days’?
14. Looking back at your life thus far, what are you most proud of?
15. What did you discover in the last decade or two that you wish you discovered sooner?
16. Favourite place you have lived?
17. What were you doing when you were my age?
18. What advice would you give your 40-year-old self?
19. When did you know that you wanted to marry mom/dad?
20. What do you remember most about your wedding day?
21. What do you wish you made more time in your life for?
22. What do you wish you spent less time doing?
23. What family tradition do you cherish the most?
24. What have YOU always wanted to ask ME?

Source: 24 Questions You Should Ask Your Parents, While You Can. By Amy Gibson
http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/amy-gibson/24-questions-to-ask-parents_b_9637278.html
TIPS FOR CONDUCTING ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

How do I ask the questions?

In general, have a basic idea of the themes that will be covered - ex. Work history, growing up in a particularly suburb.

- Have your first question well planned- later questions will flow from initial answer, keep this mostly biographical and not too emotionally demanding.

- Remember that open rather than closed questions will led to more comprehensive answers given- for example instead of asking “Was the main street of Newcastle busy in the 1960s?”, this could be worded “What was it like going to Hunter Street, Newcastle in the 1960s?” get them to personalise their answer to bring out some other stories.

- Remember silence is good, gives both the interviewer/interviewee to respond or reply in a meaningful and reflective way.

- Show you are interested by positive body language and being pleasant.

- Give interviewee time to respond to question, don’t interrupt! Get them to clarify anything that you are unsure about, it is important you may understand what is being said. It is OK to go back to re-ask a question if you don’t think it have been answered fully.

- Don’t be too worried if the interview goes off track, it may be that the interviewee has something interesting to say about another theme – this may be unexpected but just go with it!

- 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?"

- Ask follow-up questions and then ask some more.
ETHICAL PRACTICE- GRANTING PERMISSION

It is essential to liaise with the interviewee in an honest and respectful manner. Explain to them why you would like to conduct an interview, and allow them to discuss with you what they are happy to talk about, and what they prefer not to discuss. The interviewee always has a right to review, correct and/or withdraw anything in the interview- or decide to grant permission at all. They must be given this opportunity after the interview has been conducted. It is important to discuss the process and permissions with the interviewee.

The following are most important:-

Before the interview –

Collect the signed permission form from them. Examples are included in the Appendix.

It is the responsibility of the interviewer to protect the rights of interviewee by explaining:-

- Purpose of each interview, how it will be organised and recorded, whether it will be placed in a repository.
- Oral history copyright, possible future use of interviews.
- Reassure the interviewee that and that they will have the rights and opportunity to review, correct and withdraw any of it.

Important to ensure objectivity, honesty and integrity.

- Agreement to sign regarding copyright
- Ensure potentially defamatory material is not made public- each interview treated confidentially until an interviewee gives the right to share information through an agreement.
- Advise interviewee that they will receive the actual digital recording and given the opportunity to review, correct and/or withdraw material.
- Their information will be collected and stored appropriately

Participants must follow the Oral History Australia Guidelines of Ethical Practice 2007. For further information ethical practices of oral history see other sources. See Appendix 2 for sample permission form.

OTHER SOURCES

Further information about Ethical Practice here

(Guidelines, Copyright, Conditions of use). Understanding copyright

For definitive legal opinion, especially on copyright law, please consult a solicitor or contact the Australian Copyright Council, http://www.copyright.org.au
SAMPLE CONDITION OF USE FORM

Recorded interview will remain with the interviewer. Recordings may be given to Cultural Collections, University of Newcastle Library. Acknowledgement of the Interviewee and Interviewer will provided in any public use of the sources.

(Please strike out what may be irrelevant)

I, _______________________________________, (name of person being interviewed) give Permission for my interview with _______________________________ (name of interviewer) on _________________________ (date)

1. To be placed in Cultural Collections, UON Library for the purpose of exhibition use, education and/or research. (Yes/No)

2. I authorise Cultural Collections, UON Library to provide copies of the recording/s to users for research purposes. (Yes/No)

3. I authorise Cultural Collections, UON Library to grant permission for the recording/s or parts of the recording/s to be broadcast and/or made available online or in any other medium. (Yes/No)

4. I authorise Cultural Collections, UON Library to grant permission for a transcript, or parts of a transcript of the interview to be published in print, online and/or performed. (Yes/No)

5. I authorise Cultural Collections, UON Library to grant permission to copy the recording to any other medium as required to make it available for the purposes of preservation, exhibition use, education and/or research. (Yes/No)

Special Conditions:

Signature of person interviewed:

_________________________________________________

Address: ____________________________________________

_________________________________ Postcode ___________

Telephone: _____________________

Signature of interviewer: _________________________________________________

Address:

Date: ____________
WHAT DEVICE TO USE

Technology today enables us to easily record oral history interviews. It is up to you as to the device you want to use to record the interview. These include:

- Professional digital handheld recorders
- Apps for Smartphones and devices
- Traditional cassette audio tapes

Professional digital handheld recorders

Professional handheld devices are the best option and a good investment if you are serious about doing oral history recordings.

Apps for Smartphones and Devices

There are many downloadable voice recording Apps for personal devices (iPad, iPhone, androids etc.) Although these may seem a simple option, problems can occur when trying to transfer a recording from a smartphone, which isn't always easy. It is essential that a recording is able to be downloaded (preferably as a WAV file) in order to edit audio to be made available on social sound platforms, such as SoundCloud.

Smartphones already have built-in capability for recording, but the microphones in smartphones are small and weak and don't record in stereo. You can turn your smartphone into a professional recorder, by buying a plugin microphone. There are a few different types, but the highly recommended Zoom brand has their own. This would be a cheaper and more portable option than buying a separate digital recorder. It will give you professional quality recordings, providing a better and more sensitive microphone than what the standard smartphone comes with. The downside is you are limited with the battery life and data storage capacity of the smartphone, both of which are generally more limited than dedicated handheld digital recorders.

There are many free smartphone apps for voice recording:

- Voice Memos – iOS phones already come with this built-in, it is basic but does ok
- Audio Memos – has more functions and control than above
- Recorder – has good reviews online, it is worth trying
- Voice Record Pro

Traditional cassette audio tapes

Some may choose to use older style cassette tapes, which is fine, however it is important to be mindful that cassette tapes are more difficult to digitise - the UON’s Cultural Collections can digitise cassette and analogue tapes, however is more complex process. Some people may already have oral histories on cassette tapes that they have done in the past, in which case Cultural Collections may be able to assist in digitising, particularly if interviews are found to contribute to the cultural, intellectual and social life of the Hunter Region.
Although audio recording is the focus here, audio-visual (or video recording) has many advantages over oral recording. Video recording someone shows their facial expression and body language, and maps, photographs and other visual sources can be filmed to further describe the subject of the interview. Other visual sources can be included in the editing process.

What are the differences between Mp3 and WAV files?

WAV format is an older format but has many advantages when it comes to applications, most importantly it can record fairly accurately maintaining audio quality, it is also a very simple format to edit. The downside is that size of a WAV file making it difficult to upload to devices and social sound platforms. Mp3 format on the other hand is a more contemporary format, is a small size format and therefore able to digitally shared and quite large ‘libraries’ of files can be located and used on personal devices. When digitally recording oral histories it is best to record using WAV format and convert to Mp3 for easy uploading to sound platforms.

More professional devices are recommended, these can digitally record and provide WAV files for editing and reformatting (to Mp3). There are numerous portable digital devices available, Oral History NSW suggests “A good guide to selecting equipment is to buy the best you can afford, rather than the cheapest, for quality recordings of lasting integrity.”

About Digital Handheld Recorders

A variety of these can be found online. TASCAM and Zoom are both recommended brands. You could easily pay $500 for a top of the line recorder; however we will show you some more affordable options that will still give you great quality recordings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zoom H1 Handy Recorder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>$100 – 150</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portable and fits in your palm, while still having great recording quality. XY microphones for recording in stereo. Takes one AA battery, which allows for 10 hours of operation. Different packages have different accessories. The one we bought was cheaper and came with 2GB mini SD card and no USB cord included.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TASCAM DR-05</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is one of the more affordable of the professional recorders. Takes 2 AA batteries which will run the recorder for 17.5 hours, but it can also run off of USB power. Includes Peak Reduction which automatically sets the volume level for recording by listening to the input and adjusting to the best level. It also allows playback at a slower pace, which will help for transcribing. It comes with a 4GB microSD card, but you can additional purchase one with greater storage capacity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>8GB Digital Voice Recorder (GH-609)</strong></th>
<th><strong>$16 – 30</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One of the cheapest voice recorders you can get. With these as far as sound quality goes, you get what you pay for. The quality of this would only slightly better to that of a built in smartphone microphone. This is capable of recording in stereo with two separate microphones. The storage capacity of 8GB will give you 7,680 minutes of recording at 128kps. It has an in-built battery which will last up to 20 hours. It doesn’t have a tripod attachment. It only records in .mp3. This is a very small recorder, with a tiny screen.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recording FAQ

How do I know what quality to record at?
Use the chart below, think about what you are using it for. For archival purpose we use at least CD Quality (.wav files 44.1/16) Remember, the higher the quality, the larger the file.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audio Quality</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Bit Rate</th>
<th>Sample Rate</th>
<th>Bit-depth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.mp3</td>
<td>Worst</td>
<td>Streaming Online</td>
<td>64 kbps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.mp3</td>
<td>Bad</td>
<td>Original iTunes</td>
<td>128 kbps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.mp3</td>
<td>Ok</td>
<td>New iTunes</td>
<td>256 kbps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.mp3</td>
<td>Not too Bad</td>
<td>Highest Quality mp3</td>
<td>320 kbps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.wav</td>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>CD Quality</td>
<td>1411 kbps</td>
<td>44.1 kHz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.wav</td>
<td>High Def</td>
<td>DVD or HD Quality</td>
<td>4608 kbps</td>
<td>96 kHz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.wav</td>
<td>High Def</td>
<td>DVD or HD Quality</td>
<td>9216 kbps</td>
<td>192 kHz</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Want to have bit rates and sample rates explained? See: http://mymusicthing.com/hi-fi-2-0-lets-do-the-math/

What type of SD Card do I need?
If you are recording at CD quality, an 8GB card will give you approximately 12.5 hours of recording time. See chart below for comparisons.

SD cards also come with speed ratings, shown within a circle on the front of the card. For audio recording purposes, pick one with a 4 (good), 6 (better), or 10(best) rating.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REC Format</th>
<th>2GB</th>
<th>4GB</th>
<th>8GB</th>
<th>16GB</th>
<th>32GB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MP3</td>
<td>128kbps</td>
<td>34hrs43min</td>
<td>69hrs26min</td>
<td>138hrs53min</td>
<td>277hrs46min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>256kbps</td>
<td>17hrs21min</td>
<td>34hrs43min</td>
<td>69hrs26min</td>
<td>138hrs53min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>320kbps</td>
<td>13hrs53min</td>
<td>27hrs48min</td>
<td>55hrs33min</td>
<td>111hrs06min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAV</td>
<td>16bit / 44.1kHz</td>
<td>3hrs08min</td>
<td>6hrs17min</td>
<td>12hrs35min</td>
<td>25hrs11min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24bit / 48kHz</td>
<td>1hrs55min</td>
<td>3hrs51min</td>
<td>7hrs42min</td>
<td>15hrs25min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24bit / 96kHz</td>
<td>57min</td>
<td>1hrs55min</td>
<td>3hrs51min</td>
<td>7hrs42min</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Above table courtesy of Zoom from [https://www.zoom-na.com/products/field-video-recording/field-recording/zoom-h1-handy-recorder](https://www.zoom-na.com/products/field-video-recording/field-recording/zoom-h1-handy-recorder)

**Setting up to record**

Location is everything! You want a place that:

- Both you and interviewee feel comfortable and can be seated
- As noise-free as possible, no hum of fans, aircons, or traffic
- A place where you won’t be disrupted by other people
- Has an area for you to set the recorder
  - Use a tripod if possible, set between you both at equal distance
  - If using a hard surface to put recorder on put down a cloth to reduce feedback from echo

Do a test run to make sure you can hear both voices on the recording, play it back and listen through headphones.

**Transferring files to the computer**

This can be done by USB cable or through the SD cards. Check whether your computer has an in-built SD card reader, if not, make sure your digital recorder comes with a USB cable. Many USB devices have cables that are cross-compatible, you might already have one at home that fits your recorder. If not, you can get them for under $5. You can also buy SD card readers to plug into USB ports.