



*Image courtesy of Special Collections, University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.*

# Telling Herstories

A Guide to Conducting Oral History  
Interviews for the Chattanooga  
Women's Oral History Project

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City of Chattanooga Mayor's Council for  
Women History Committee

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# Introduction

The City of Chattanooga Mayor's Council for Women and the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga invite you to turn to members of your family and community to help us preserve the legacy of women in the greater Chattanooga area. This guide outlines the techniques and processes developed by the Telling Herstories Subcommittee to collect interviews from families and the community. It features a general guide to conducting an interview, a sample list of questions that may be adapted, and instructions on using equipment from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga's (UTC) Special Collections to ensure preservation-quality recordings.

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# Get Involved

Before scheduling an interview, contact Susan Eckelmann Berghel, co-chair of the Telling Herstories Subcommittee, at [Susan-Eckelmann@utc.edu](mailto:Susan-Eckelmann@utc.edu) or (423) 425-5621. She will work with other members of the committee to ensure that the subcommittee tracks your progress and that you follow the procedures outlined below that you ethically and responsibly record a preservation-friendly interview. If you do not have family or community members to you want to interview, Professor Eckelmann Berghel may provide the names and contact information of potential interviewees.

## Contact Interviewee

It is your responsibility to contact interviewees and schedule a convenient time to record the interview. Below is a sample introduction you may use to phone or email potential interviewees.

*This is [your name] [calling/writing] on behalf of the City of Chattanooga Mayor's Council for Women to see if you are interested in participating in the Chattanooga Women's Oral History Project. The Telling Herstories subcommittee of the Mayor's Council is collecting interviews with women in the greater Chattanooga area to document local women's accomplishments, activism, and experiences as leaders, advocates, educators, and community builders. Would you be willing to be interviewed for this project?*

During the initial phone call, you need to explain that interviewees must sign a release form that transfers all legal title, copyright, and literary property rights to the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga (UTC), the official repository of the Mayor's Council for Women History Committee. The release form gives the university the ability to permanently preserve the recordings. Interviewees who wish to remain anonymous must sign and date the release, and indicate in the Conditions and Restrictions section of the UTC Oral History Release that they wish to remain unidentified. UTC's Special Collections will edit the recordings to ensure anonymity as requested by the interviewee.

The interview should take place in a quiet and relaxed atmosphere. The home of the person you are interview is usually the best place but, the interviewee's office, community center, or church may also be good spaces. Regardless of the location, the interviewee should be comfortable and the space should be free from distracting background noise. Restaurants, coffee shops, and parks do not make good interview locations.

# Check Out Equipment

An important first step in conducting an interview to acquire the right equipment. While most smart phones include voice memo functions, these do not make good oral histories. The recordings are often low quality, resulting in a loss of audio from one or both of the interview participants. What is more, they are not preservation quality digital formats. We conform to formats and settings recommended by the United States Federal Agencies Digital Guidelines Initiative (FADGI).

**Once you have scheduled your interview, you will need to check out a recorder from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga's (UTC) [Special Collections](#). Contact Special Collections at [archives@utc.edu](mailto:archives@utc.edu) or (423) 425-4503 to make arrangements.** These recorders are preset to record high quality audio that ensures our ability to preserve the interviews. Once you have recorded your interview, you must return the recorder to Special Collections where trained professionals will process the digital files, moving them to a redundant digital preservation storage environment.

# Conduct Interview

Once the interview is scheduled and you have checked out a recorder from UTC's Special Collections, you are ready to record the oral history. **Before the interview, remember to print copies of the Field Notes and Oral History Release forms, which are available for download from the UTC Special Collections [Conduct an Oral History Interview](#) webpage.**<sup>1</sup> Bring both forms to the interview along with a pen or pencil and clipboard or something else to write on. You should also print out and select specific interview questions

Once you've arrived at the interview, take a little time at the beginning to introduce yourself and discuss the nature of the Chattanooga Women's Oral History Project. When you are both ready to record, place the recorder between you and interviewee, and run a test before you begin. Record a minute of conversation, and play it back to make sure both voices are heard. A good way to start is to state your name, the interviewee's name, the date, location, and reason for the interview and ask the first question.

*This is an interview with [name of interviewee] on [date of interview] in [city location of interview]. My name is [name of interviewer]. I am conducting this interview for the Chattanooga Women's Oral History Project. Please state and spell your first name for the record.*

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<sup>1</sup> Visit UTC's Special Collections *Conduct an Oral History Interview* webpage at <http://www.utc.edu/library/special-collections/research/conduct-interview.php>.

Once the interviewee has answered, stop and check the recording. If the playback sounds good, go ahead and continue with the interview.

Most interviews end with a request for the names, and often contact information, of other women who might contribute their voices to the project. Before asking for this information, conclude the interview by thanking the interviewee and turn off the recorder. Record the names and contact information of the potential interviewees on the [Field Notes](#) form.<sup>2</sup> This ensures that private information about potential interviewees is not published online.

Once you have recorded your interview, you and the interviewee must both sign the [University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Oral History Release](#).<sup>3</sup> This release transfers legal title and copyright of the recording to the University, which allows UTC's Special Collections to preserve and publish the interview online. The Conditions or Restrictions section of the release form also gives interviewees the opportunity to identify portions of the interview they do not want to publish online or to stipulate anonymity.

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<sup>2</sup> Download the field notes from UTC's Special Collections *Conduct an Oral History Interview* webpage at <http://www.utc.edu/library/special-collections/research/conduct-interview.php>.

<sup>3</sup> Download the release from UTC's Special Collections *Conduct an Oral History Interview* webpage at <http://www.utc.edu/library/special-collections/research/conduct-interview.php>.

# Interview Questions

Use the script below to ask questions, but do not be afraid to ask questions of your own design or follow up with interviewees based on their responses. You may skip questions that seem irrelevant to the interviewee.

This is an interview with **[name of interviewee]** on **[date of interview]** in **[city location of interview]**. My name is **[name of interviewer]**. I am conducting this interview for the Chattanooga Women's Oral History Project.

1. Please state and spell your name for the record.

*[Take a moment to play back the recording at this time. If everything sounds good, continue with the recording.]*

2. When and where were you born?
  - a. Did you grow up in Chattanooga? In what neighborhood? Can you tell me a bit more about what the neighborhood was like and how it has changed over time?
  - b. Since you were not born in Chattanooga, when did you arrive? (year or age). How did you come to live in Chattanooga? How did your life differ in Chattanooga compared to your previous location?
3. What local historical events in Chattanooga have occurred during your time here? Did they impact you personally? If so, expand on this memory.
4. What memories do you have of significant historical events that took place when you were growing up?
5. Tell me a bit more about your educational history. Where and which schools did you attend?
6. How would you describe your educational experiences and how, if so, did these experiences impact your professional decisions? Did you experience any challenges in your education?
7. How were women and girls treated in schools you attended?
8. Can you tell me a bit more about your family, parents, and siblings?
9. Have health issues impacted your life or those in your family? In what ways?
10. What jobs have you had and what do you do now? How did you come to do this work?
11. What has this work meant to you?
12. How have you balanced different priorities, responsibilities, roles, and interests?

13. What advice would you give a woman or girl going into a leadership position for the first time?
14. What do you think are the pros and cons of the professional path you have chosen?
15. How do you feel about the professional choices you've made in your life? Do you have any regrets?
16. How have others encouraged your own creativity? Can you think of a specific conversation or event where you found yourself revitalized?
17. How has technology changed the way in which women lead in Chattanooga?
18. How do you move around the city? Do you drive? Do you ride the bus? Are there particular areas of the city where you spend a lot of time?
19. As a woman, are there spaces that make you more aware of your gender?
20. Have you been involved in volunteer or community work to advance women's issues?
  - a. If so, what groups did you work with/for?
  - b. What led you to join with this organization?
  - c. What were the organization's main goals?
  - d. What were some of the main programs/initiatives that you worked on?
  - e. What would you consider the group's major accomplishments, esp. in respect to women's concerns?
21. After years of community leadership and service, it is often easy to become frustrated with the roadblocks and lack of success—even when you've made great strides. How did you keep your focus?
22. What are you doing to ensure you continue to grow and develop as a community member?
23. If you were asked to offer advice to a young woman whose goal is to become an active, participating citizen in Chattanooga, what would you suggest?
24. What do you think is the most common mistake that leaders make when tackling challenging issues in general or specifically when it comes to women's issues?
25. What do you perceive to be the 'core elements' of a successful city? What do you believe have been accomplished here in Chattanooga and Hamilton County? What remains to be done, esp. with regard to concerns for women?

26. If you were crafting the ideal committee to address one of the areas where work remains, which individuals might you invite to serve on that committee?
27. How do you define success in your life? Has this definition changed over time?
28. Based on your life experience, what advice would you give to women of today and future generations?
29. Are there aspects that you would like to share with this project we have not addressed thus far?

That was the last question. Thank you for speaking with me today. It was a pleasure.

*[Ask the following question after you have turned off the recorder. This makes it easier to remove personal information, including phone numbers and email address of the women suggested. Be sure to record the information on the Field Notes form.]*

30. Are there any other women in Chattanooga we should consider interviewing for this project?



# Interview Checklist

Use this checklist to ensure ethical and professional collection of oral histories for the Chattanooga Women's Oral History Project.

## Before the Interview

- Make an appointment with your interviewer to schedule the interview.
- Check out and test a **Zoom H1 Handy Recorder** from **UTC's Special Collections** to record a preservation quality **96 kHz, 24 bit WAV** file.
- Download and print the **Oral History Release** form and the **Oral History Interview Field Notes** worksheet from UTC's Special Collections [Conduct an Oral History Interview](http://www.utc.edu/library/special-collections/research/conduct-interview.php) webpage at <http://www.utc.edu/library/special-collections/research/conduct-interview.php>.

## During the Interview

- Present the **Oral History Release** form to interviewee.
- Explain the interview process and the rights and responsibilities of both parties.
- Be prepared for silences & be prepared to follow up on specific questions.

## After the Interview

- Make sure you and the interviewee sign the **Oral History Release** form.
- Review, edit, or clarify notes on your **Oral History Interview Field Notes**. Avoid stereotypes misrepresentations, and manipulations of the interviewee's words. Strive to retain the integrity of the interviewee's perspective.
- Return the Zoom H1 Handy Recorder to UTC's Special Collections along with the signed/dated Oral History Release form and Oral History Interview Field Notes worksheet.
- Send a **thank you** note to the interviewee immediately following the interview.

We are unable to accept recordings without the accompanying Oral History Interview Field Notes and signed Oral History Release.

# Recording Instructions

In order to record your oral history to archival standard, you will need to accomplish the following:

- record a 96 kHz, 24 bit WAV with a Zoom H1 Handy Recorder from UTC's Special Collections;
- obtain a signed and dated **Oral History Release**;
- complete the **Oral History Field Notes** worksheet;
- and return the recorder, release, and field notes to UTC's Special Collections.

Follow these instructions to use a professional recorder to capture your interview.

- Check out a Zoom H1 Handy Recorder from the Library's Special Collections, located in the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga Library at 600 Douglas Street in Chattanooga, Tennessee on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of the building. Test the batteries. You may need to replace them before your interview.
- Insert the microSD card in and hold the /hold slider down toward the power symbol until the recorder turns on. Whenever possible, use the USB cord and adapter to plug the recorder into an outlet.
- Adjust the following settings with buttons located on the back of the recorder:
  - LO CUT: ON
  - AUTO LEVEL: OFF
  - REC FORMAT: WAV
- Make sure that you are recording with the following settings:
  - 96/24 WAV: This information is available on the home screen and should be visible when the recorder is powered on. Use the fast forward button to adjust recording format as needed.
  - VOL 100: Adjust the volume on the side of the recorder to view the settings. Use the + and – buttons to adjust as needed.
  - Level 100: Adjust the input level on the side of the record the view the settings. Use the + and – buttons to adjust as needed.
- To begin recording, place the recorder on a stable surface between you and the interviewee and push the red button. The REC/PEAK light located below the microphones will remain steadily red during the recording.
- Conduct the interview using the questions provided in the Questions section of this document.
- When you have concluded your interview, press the red button again. This will end the recording.  
Hold the power/hold slider down located on the side of the recorder down until the recorder turns off.