

Correspondence between Dr. W. I. Smith and Mr. K. D. Lunam, Registrar-Examiner of Charitable Organizations, Department of National Revenue, Ottawa, contains further guidance on this subject and is published in the first issue of the Archives Section Bulletin, January, 1971.

#### ORAL INTERVIEWS

##### York University's Oral History Programme

Why do oral history? It is curious that such a question would even be credible in 1970. Oral history has been widely and skillfully used for almost two decades in the United States, and there are great projects, such as that at Columbia University, that have collected indispensable materials. But in Canada there are very few historians, archives, or universities involved in this field. To the best of my knowledge, only one scholarly book has been published that makes extensive use of materials collected by this technique - Victor Hoar's The Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion - and significantly the author is an American. But the need for oral history is present and increasing, and Canadian historians, political scientists and archivists will have to become expert in this method.

The reason is very simple. Until now our history has been largely prepared from manuscript sources, from the letters of politicians and their friends, and from the memoranda and documents of organizations and government departments. Today, in an age of conference telephone calls and easy jet travel, the letter is dead or dying. Everyone of the politicians in Parliament today has free telephone service and virtually unlimited travel to his constituency. In such circumstances and without their traditional sources, how will historians be able to discover what the policy-makers and politicians were doing? Very simply, they won't. In sum, that is the rationale for an oral history programme, but it must be added that this technique also allows historians to create and have access to the history of the people. This is a potential breakthrough to a new kind of history - a true story of the events and their participants.

We know, of course, that human memory is distressingly fallible. People remember what they choose, and men in public life, in particular, often tend to portray themselves in the best light possible. Notwithstanding these drawbacks, oral history gives the historian of the present access to a source he would not otherwise have. As with all sources he uses, of course, he must exercise care, but imagine what historians could do with oral interviews with the participants in the Charlottetown or Quebec Conference, with the men involved in the conscription crisis of 1917, or with the men who served with and turned against John Diefenbaker.

This last project is the one with which I am involved. In 1968, York University's Institute for Behavioural Research agreed to establish an Oral History Programme. The first project was a study of the Progressive Conservative Party in the Diefenbaker Years (1956-1967). The project was interesting and important in itself, and the interviewers involved (Professors Paul Stevens, Peter Oliver and J. L. Granatstein) knew many of the participants and were all Canadian historians with research

interests in the area. The result has been a continuing programme of interviews, generously financed by the Canada Council. The Council's award was a precedent, being the first grant for this type of study. To date, the interviewers have talked to almost twenty Cabinet ministers, key organizers, provincial premiers, and Opposition figures, and the York files contain some 150 hours of taped interviews and over 4,000 pages of transcribed material. With some confidence, we feel that no one will be able to write the history of the period without reading, for example, our thirteen-hour interview with Mr. Dalton Camp, our ten hours with Mr. Eddie Goodman, or our eight hours with Hon. Pierre Sévigny.

Of course, the interviews overlap and often become contradictory. If we hear the story of the Cabinet collapse of 1963 once more, we are liable to collapse ourselves. But if truth can be reconstructed out of the differing accounts of participants, then we have important material here. And we believe that we do.

Because many of the gentlemen interviewed are still active in politics or still have hopes of returning to the party wars, we were obviously faced with a special problem. How could we get participants in contentious events to talk freely about confidential matters? The solitary solution was to pledge ourselves to respect the confidential nature of the material and to give the politicians legal guarantees of that. The result was a statement, "Conditions Governing the Use of Material", (see below) that was prepared in consultation with the University solicitor, a copy of which goes to each person interviewed. Basically these conditions allow the subject to determine the period for which his transcript and tapes shall be closed to researchers, and most have fixed terms of twenty years, although some have specified shorter periods and some have stated that their interview will become open after their death. The conditions also make clear guarantees about the security of the material: "Researchers, interviewers, copyrighters and all persons employed by the University directly or indirectly in preparation of the record of the interrogation and interviews...shall be sworn to secrecy and undertake not to retain any such record in part or in whole nor to publish the same...".

Overdone? Perhaps, but we believed then and we still believe now that such steps were essential. This means that the interviewers have to operate under a self-denying ordinance, binding themselves not to make use of material they learn in interviews. I have done some writing on foreign policy, for example, and often refer to the nuclear crisis of 1963. It is frankly very difficult to avoid making use of confidential interview material, and it requires a deliberate act of will not to do so. In addition, our security requirements obliged us to acquire a safe at the University and the services of a bonded secretary.

This security would be pointless if the material we were getting was inconsequential. If it does have value, it is because we have learned some techniques of interviewing, largely through hard experience. In the first place, we never have less than two nor more than three interviewers. One person cannot establish the required rapport - a blend of friendliness and firmness - that is required with the subject. Two or three people can, and they can master complex material better by dividing it into manageable portions. But how do you ask questions? There are no hard and fast rules, for clearly you require different skills to interview a Davie Fulton or a Pierre Sévigny. But our experience has been that certain of the milder techniques of police interrogation are useful. One interviewer is the prosecutor, the others are the prisoner's friends, and the two sides

alternate in applying their techniques of persuasion. We do try to avoid fighting with the subject over points under discussion and we do not press beyond a certain point. But if we get a response that is simply not credible we will not hesitate to take up the challenge. This technique requires stamina on both sides, sometimes periodic infusions of alcoholic beverages, and comfortable surroundings. The overriding factor in a successful interview, however, still remains the memory of the subject and his willingness to talk. Without these, all is lost.

Without good equipment, all can be lost, too. After some experimentation, the York Oral History Programme adopted the Uher 5000 tape recorder. This lightweight machine comes equipped with a sensitive microphone that can adequately pick up conversation around a living room or a large table, and with a foot-pedal and ear-phones for subsequent transcription of the tapes. The cost of the machine is just over \$400. We use 900-foot reels of good quality tape, and we operate the recorder at a speed of 1 7/8. This does not produce sound of broadcast quality, but it gives good reproduction and a period of one and one-half hours between tape changes.

To transcribe interviews is also no simple task. The typist has to be able and intelligent, and she must know the period. How else is she to sort through the names and places and the often garbled conversations that are tossed out in interviews? At York, the typist prepares a first draft that is then edited by one of the interviewers. Grammatical slips are eliminated, repetition is removed, and a coherent transcript that is faithful to the tape is produced. A second draft is then typed, the original being retained at York and the carbon being sent to the subject. The tape is also retained at York.

Our experience suggests that the costs for an oral history programme are surprisingly moderate, excepting the original price of the tape recorder and the costs of travel. One hour of tape produces a transcript of some thirty pages, and for two drafts approximately five hours of typing time are required. We estimate that this costs us under \$14. To make the best possible use of our transcripts, we hope eventually to prepare an index, and this may be costly.

To date, the original project at York has spawned one offspring, a study of the Canadian role in the formation of NATO. A number of other projects are being discussed, including a study of historians and historiography. There are subjects aplenty, but anyone thinking of becoming involved has to be prepared to make a substantial investment of time. The rewards are great, however, and we have the history of the nation to record.

#### APPENDIX

#### York University: Institute for Behavioural Research: Oral History Programme.

##### Conditions Governing Use of Material

1. Ownership of Material - Material prepared by York University in whatever form shall be and shall remain the property of the University.
2. Publication and Sale - No verbatim report, edited transcript or quotation shall be published by the University until the expiry of \_\_\_\_\_ years at which time the entire record shall be made available

to the public.

3. Copyright - Recorded material may in the discretion of the University be copyrighted in the name of the University provided copyright shall in no way affect or limit the right of the party interviewed to publish and otherwise to make use of the same information at any time but only to the extent the same was contributed by such person.
4. Editing - York University may in its discretion publish or make use of edited material based on the interview record, after the expiry of the above-mentioned term.
5. Security - Only one original and one carbon copy shall be made of the transcript of the interview or interviews hereunder. The University shall keep in such place or places as they deem appropriate to secure their safety and secrecy all tapes of the interview or interviews and the original transcript thereof and shall allow access to no one except with the written authorization of the interviewee or his personal representatives during the above-mentioned term. The carbon copy will be delivered to the interviewee.
6. Researcher and Interviewer - Researchers, interviewers, copyrighters and all persons employed by the University directly or indirectly in preparation of the record of the interrogation and interviews referred to herein, shall be sworn to secrecy and undertake not to retain any such record in part or in whole nor to publish the same and shall assign to the University any compensation or reward to which they may become entitled in the event of such disclosure.

NOTE:

In Clause 2 and in the Acceptance in the attached letter, the inserted figure should be that agreed between the Project Director and the Interviewee.

J. L. Granatstein  
York University

Mr. GORDON CUNNINGHAM of the CBC emphasized that interviews were recorded by the staff of the Corporation on the understanding that they could be used immediately and at any time in the future. This approach was essentially journalistic and the security arrangements provided by oral historians were not, therefore, possible, although those being interviewed were well aware of the fact. He recognized that there was much over-recording in broadcast terms, especially in the Diefenbaker-Pearson project, for instance. The CBC is very conscious of the value of this additional footage, and the fact that a program may only be heard once. The CBC Archives receives copies of all sound and video tape covering the general history field, including valuable "profiles" of prominent people active during the Thirties and Forties. There would seem to be the possibility of exchange of unrestricted tapes with oral historians through dubbing, although the low speeds at which oral history interviews are conducted may make them unsuitable for broadcasting.

There is no reason why oral historians should not submit program material to the CBC on a freelance basis and, if successful, augment their funds in this way. In time, a documentary may be acceptable as

part of the requirements for a post-graduate degree. Mr. Cunningham made it clear, however, that the CBC Archives did not have sufficient staff to deal with the public on a regular basis, but that dubbings of tape could, on occasion, be provided at the cost of the tape.

Mr. GEORGES DELISLE of the Public Archives of Canada said that negotiations were in progress for the deposit of copies of the CBC's early tapes in the Public Archives. Much of the discussion revolved around the need for information on oral history projects in progress and the problem of copyright.

#### TABLE RONDE DES ARCHIVES

Jérusalem, 31 août - 3 septembre 1970

Une cinquantaine de personnes ont participé à cette douzième conférence. En plus des agences internationales, une quinzaine de pays étaient représentés: Allemagne de l'Ouest, Autriche, Belgique, Brésil, Canada, Danemark, Espagne, France, Ghana, Grande-Bretagne, Israël, Norvège, Pays-Bas, Suède, U.S.A.

Suivant la coutume, les discussions prirent comme point de départ les rapports qui résumaient les enquêtes menées par correspondance au cours de l'année. Le rapport de Christian Gut (Directeur des Services d'Archives de Paris) portait sur les Archives imprimées, celui de Robert-Henri Bautier (Professeur à l'école des Chartes) sur la mission des archives et les tâches des archivistes. Ces rapports seront publiés sous peu dans Archivum. Je me contenterai donc de souligner certains points:-

#### Archives imprimées

Il y eut une assez vive discussion sur la signification même du terme. On en vint à la conclusion qu'il aurait été plus juste de parler des imprimés dans les archives. Tous étaient d'accord que beaucoup d'archives étaient maintenant imprimées, mais devraient être traitées comme les autres documents; certains allaient plus loin, croyaient à la nécessité pour les archives de conserver non seulement les archives proprement dites, mais aussi toutes les publications gouvernementales, et aussi un choix judicieux d'imprimés de nature éphémère, affiches, journaux clandestins, circulaires etc., qui n'étaient pas conservés dans les bibliothèques.

#### Missions des archives

La grande majorité des pays sont maintenant d'avis que les archives, notamment les Archives Nationales, ont le devoir de conserver non seulement les archives gouvernementales, mais aussi les archives privées d'intérêt politique, économique, social ou culturel. Les archives ont aussi un rôle à jouer dans la gestion des dossiers, dès après leur création.

#### Les tâches des archivistes

Deux questions ont été débattues: la formation des archivistes doit-elle être, avant tout, historique; dans quelle mesure l'archiviste doit-il pouvoir poursuivre ses recherches personnelles durant les heures de travail.