



Oral Histories



A good way to learn about our past is to ask senior citizens to remember people and events from their youth. An *Oral History* is a record of your conversation that you can share with others.

The Seaford Historical Society would like to collect audio and video oral histories from people in our community. Here's how.

Steps for Recording an Oral History

1. Identify who you are going to interview
2. Prepare for the interview
3. Determine how you're going to record the interview
4. Conduct the interview
5. Edit and submit the oral history

Step 1: Identify whom you are going to interview

You need to interview someone who has interesting stories to tell about a unique time in our history, or who can remember the stories that they were told to them as children. We're going to refer to this person as "your subject."

You should be comfortable with your subject. Good choices are:

- Grandparents
- Aunts or Uncles
- Family friends
- Teachers and Ministers

**Based on material
from NCTE and
the Minnesota
Historical Society**



Step 2: Prepare for the Interview

Before you start, learn all that you can about your subject. Where did he/she grow up and go to school? What did he/she do for a living? Who were your subject's friends? The more you know, the better your questions will be.

If possible, gather pictures and keepsakes that will serve as “memory triggers,” to get your subject talking.

The most important thing to do in advance is write good interview questions! Do your best to ask open-ended questions and avoid those can be answered with a yes or no. See page 4 for some sample questions.

Don't Ask _____

Did you like church picnics?

Was your grandfather funny?

Instead Ask _____

What do you remember about church picnics?

What is your favorite memory of your grandfather?

You should also avoid asking your subject leading questions.

I understand Rev. Jones was a wonderful preacher. What do you think?

Tell me about Rev. Jones. What were his sermons like?

Put your most important questions early in the interview. If you have to end early, then you'll have what you need.

Don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions like, “Can you tell me more about that?” Just remember that the goal is to keep your subject talking.

Step 3: Determine where and how you're going to conduct the interview

It's best to conduct your interview in a place that's comfortable for your subject, like their home or church, and try to arrange a time when there will be few interruptions.

You also need to consider if you're going to make an audio or video recording of the interview.

Audio – be sure that the room is quiet and that the microphone is close to your subject.

Video – be sure your subject is not backlit. Lighting from the front left or right is best.

Place your camera or phone on a tripod or sturdy base.

Do a sound check to be sure the microphone is working properly.

If using your phone, record in landscape (sideways) format.

Step 4: Conduct the Interview

Be sure that your subject is comfortable and that your recording device is working.

Start with some simple questions to get your subject talking – what is his/her name, where was he/she they born, on what street did the family live, and so on.

Ask your questions and then listen to the response without interrupting. If you have a question, write it down and ask it when your subject has finished. Encourage your subject to elaborate on the emotions associated with the memories being shared; you want to get more than just the facts.

Use the memory triggers that you gathered to get your subject talking freely.

Don't go too long, especially with older subjects. Ask your most important questions near the beginning so you get them in before you need to end the session.

When finished, be sure to thank your subject and be sure that he/she has signed the consent form (see page 5).

Step 5: Edit and submit the oral history

The Seaford Historical Society is interested in short video or audio segments that we can place on our website, social media, and museum exhibits.

Edit your oral history interview into separate audio or video files that are 1 to 3 minutes in length.

Each video segment must include the name of your subject, the date of the interview, and your name written in the lower part of the image.



Avoid using special video effects that distract the viewer from what your subject is saying. Simple cuts, fades, and wipes are acceptable for transitions.

Audio recordings must be submitted with a digital photograph of your subject and may include pictures of items used as memory triggers and of yourself.

All submissions must include signed letters of consent (page 5) from your subject.

If you are under 18, we need written permission from your parent/guardian.

Completed oral history files may be submitted in one of two ways:

1. Portable storage device (e.g. thumb drive)
 - a. Deliver or mail to The Seaford Museum, 203 High Street, Seaford, DE 19973
 - b. Include the signed letter of consent
2. Link to online site
 - a. Post the video on a site, such as YouTube.
 - b. Provide a link to the site via email: admin@seafordhistoricalsociety.com
 - c. Mail the signed letter of consent to the Seaford Museum at the address above.

Sample Oral History Sample Questions

Your goal is to get the subject talking about his or her memories of Seaford and let the conversation move naturally. However, you may need to ask some questions to get things started or keep things moving. The questions below are suggestions, it is NOT a checklist.

Basic Questions

What is your full name? Is there a story behind how you got your name?

Where did you grow up?

Where did you go to school?

Where did you play with your friends?

What did your parents do?

What is your earliest memory?

Neighborhood Questions

What did you call your neighborhood?

What were its boundaries?

Where did you hang out as a kid (or young adult)?

What places were you not allowed to go? Why not?

Who in the neighborhood knew everything that was going on?

Who did your neighbors go to when they needed help?

What was the best thing about living in that neighborhood?

How has the neighborhood changed since you were young?

What memories come to mind when you think about growing up in your neighborhood?

Church Questions

What church did you attend?

Which preacher had the most influence on you? How so?

What memories come to mind when you think about that church?

What churches did your friends attend?

Ancestor Questions

Did your grandparents (great-grandparents) grow up in the Seaford area?

What are your favorite memories of them?

Did any of them talk about what Seaford was like when they were young? If so, what?

What did your grandparents (great-grandparents) do for a living?

What were their feelings about how our town had changed over their lifetimes?

Do you have anything that belonged to your grandparents (great-grandparents)?

What meaning does it (do they) hold for you?

Societal Questions

What do most people NOT know about life in Seaford when you were a child?

How are things better (or worse) in Seaford than when you were a kid?



The Seaford Historical Society

Oral History Participant Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in the Seaford Historical Society’s **History through Family: The African-American Experience in Seaford, Delaware** oral history project. You have been selected because you have a wealth of knowledge about Seaford’s past and how it has grown and changed over the years.

The interview will be audio/video recorded, edited, and it may be included, in whole or part, as a part of the **History through Family** exhibit at the Seaford Museum during the summer of 2021. Additionally, the video may be linked to the Seaford Historical Society website before, during, or following the exhibit and it may be used for promotional purposes through various media.

As the subject of the interview, you are entitled to pause or end the recording at your discretion, request that responses not be included in the final product, change or expand your responses, or request that the interview not be included in the project. In the event that you withdraw for the interview, or request that it not be included in the exhibit after the interview has been completed; the recording will be deleted and any transcripts destroyed.

On the second page of this Consent Form you may request special provision for the use or storage of your interview.

Except as indicated in the comments on page 2, the interview content (including audio and video recording, images, and transcripts) will become the sole property of the Seaford Historical Society for use in any manner they deem appropriate, including use in the **History through Family** exhibit, future permanent or temporary exhibitions, promotions, or academic research projects.

The interviewer and subject may request electronic or physical copies of the product at any time without fee other than the cost of storage media.

If you have any questions, please contact the Seaford Historical Society at (302)628-9828 or by email at admin@seafordhistoricalsociety.com.

You will be interviewed by: _____ Date: _____

Interviewer Signature: _____

Interviewer Phone: _____ Email: _____

Seaford Historical Society: Oral History Participant Consent Form

Name of Interview Subject: _____

Interview Subject signature: _____

Interview Subject Phone: _____ Email: _____

Date: _____

Special Requests by Interview Subject

Interviewer Initials: _____

Interview Subject Initials: _____