Oral History *Can* Be Worthwhile

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ORAL history is a spoken reminiscence which has been recorded with the aid of a trained interviewer-historian in accordance with recognized ethical and procedural standards and typewritten under his supervision. Without adherence to such standards, this method of question and answer, electrical recording, and transcription is only an ordinary interview; it is *not* oral history and is not worthy of the name.

This discussion will show that evidence obtained from interviews is already being used in the production of scholarly works in economics, sociology, and psychology. Yet it will be seen that the interview method can, in careless or irresponsible hands, produce reminiscences filled with problems for the historian. Because the first book of historical scholarship to be based in part on formal oral history has recently appeared, it will be examined in detail to see how much help the evidence from interviews gave its authors. Finally, in the section of this article headed "Standards for the Manufacture of Reminiscences With a Recording Device," 14 suggestions will be made for the improvement and standardization of oral history techniques and procedures. These standards are offered as a means of making reminiscences more reliable sources for twentieth-century history and biography.

Interviewing of the great, of persons who knew the great, and of those who have participated in great events is at least as old as journalism. Some believe the first published newspaper interview to date from 1859, and interviewing became common practice during the 1860's. Then, as now, the method had its friends and its enemies. The London *Daily News* remarked in 1869, "A portion of the daily newspapers in New York are bringing the profession of journalism into contempt, so far as they can, by a kind of toadyism

[1] This paper was read in part at the annual meeting of the American Association for State and Local History at Madison, Wisconsin, September 9, 1954. The author, director of the welfare research project, Commonwealth Club of California, completes a 2-year study of California social welfare in September. After receiving from Stanford the Ph.D. degree in history, 1951, he was research associate of the Institute of American History at Stanford, 1951-53, specializing in twentieth-century labor history and on Franklin D. Roosevelt. Earlier, after 4 years in the Navy, he was instructor in history at the University of Miami, 1946-48.

or flunkeyism which they call 'interviewing'." And the New York *Nation* added that an interview was "generally the joint product of some humbug of a hack politician and another humbug of a newspaper reporter." Even in 1954 budding reporters were warned to expect the worst by one specialist in mass communications, Stewart Harral, who wrote:

> Some of your interviewees may resort to "half-truths." As an interviewer, you must distinguish between lies due to mental conflict, lies of revenge, accidental lies, lies of vanity, lies as defense mechanisms, white lies, lies of loyalty, seeming lies which arise in differences in viewpoint regarding matters, and lies due to a desire to control the situation.[2]

As early as 1902 a sociologist warned those who were interviewing strangers, "Most persons feel reluctant to tell a lie in so many words, but few have any compunctions in deceiving by manner, and the like, persons toward whom they have no obligation." [3] To overcome such hazards, these young journalists are instructed today on techniques of questioning, on conversational leads, and on psychological tricks. "Do's" and "don'ts" are presented in abundance.

One writer distinguishes among 11 types of interviewing questions: rhetorical, leading, unequivocal, polite, peremptory, provocative, sugar-coated, counter-question, camouflaged, tactful, and all-embracing. She urges good listening, giving 4 categories of listening: receptive, composed, thoughtful, and sympathetic. A "comfortable silence" is thought a great asset,[4] although some psychologists are urging frequent use of an affirmative nod of the head or an almost noncommital "uh-huh" or grunt as a symbol of close attention and encouragement.

In recent years interviewing has by no means been limited to newspapermen and poll takers. Whole books of scholarly merit have had interviews as their chief source of information. For example, Cayton and Mitchell interviewed about 900 workmen, plant managers, and union officials to write their long account of Negroes and unions.[5] Sayles and Strauss, staff members of the New York School of Industrial and Labor Relations, interviewed several hundred

[2] Stewart Harral, *Keys to Successful Interviewing* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1954), pp. 61-62; the newspaper quotations are from p. 198.

[3] Charles H. Cooley, *Human Nature and the Social Order*, quoted *ibid.*, p. 62.

[4] Kathleen Ormsby Larkin, *For Volunteers Who Interview* (Welfare Council of Metropolitan Chicago, [1950?], pp. 17-20.

[5] Horace R. Cayton and George S. Mitchell, *Black Workers and the New Unions* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1939). Names of interviewees were withheld to protect them from possible reprisals. Such unorthodox footnotes as "Interview material gathered in 1934" appear.

union members while preparing their grassroots study, *The Local Union.*[6] They took no notes during their "informal discussions" at meetings or at ball games. They assert that some of their most valuable material was gathered in this way.[7] And they are among good company in their reliance on memory, for Arthur Krock, dean of the *New York Times* staff, does not take notes either.[8] Another technique was used by the National Opinion Research Center to gather information from 91 persons as a basis for the fascinating book by F. Emerson Andrews, *Attitudes Toward Giving.*[9] Interviewers used an elaborate schedule of standardized questions, taking lengthy stenographic notes. Mr. Andrews states, however, "The data are sometimes dubious, based on memory which in several instances changed within the single interview and tinctured occasionally with the desire to impress." [10] Mary N. Winslow interviewed only one person, the pioneer friend of women factory workers, Mary Anderson, to produce what amounts to an autobiography of Miss Anderson. Conversations and interviews, stenographically recorded and pieced into a dramatic narrative, seem to have been about the only sources used by this collaborator.[11] None of these books seem to fit the definition of oral history presented above. A book which comes, or *seems* to come, far closer is one of far less scholarship than any of these.

We Never Called Him Henry, the opinionated memoirs of muscular Harry Bennett,[12] sprang into print in pocket-book form in 1951 to haunt the research and writing efforts of scholars at Dearborn, Michigan. Bennett's interviewer, Paul Marcus, writes in the foreword to the book, "I spent six weeks with Harry Bennett. I listened to him talk and took exhaustive notes. I prodded and nagged at his memory, and asked countless questions. . . . I have only added some paragraphs of historical background, and these are set in italics so that they may be recognized." Thus the book is almost one long quote from Mr. Bennett, who states among other

[6] Leonard R. Sayles and George Strauss, *The Local Union; Its Place in the Industrial Plant* (New York, 1953).

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 260-261.

[8] "I don't take notes. Thus far my memory has not failed me, though I hasten to make notes as soon as I am out of sight of the person interviewed. If the interview is by telephone, of course, I do make notes, but necessarily they are sketchy. If statistics are involved, I find some reason to have them repeated, to lodge them more firmly in my memory." Quoted in Harral, *Successful Interviewing*, pp. 129-130.

[9] (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1953).

[10] *Ibid.*, p. 7.

[11] *Woman at Work; the Autobiography of Mary Anderson, as Told to Mary N. Winslow* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1951).

[12] "As Told to Paul Marcus" (New York, Fawcett Publications, 1951).

things that it was he who killed the sociology department of the Ford Motor Company:

> I felt the whole setup meant a stupid waste of time and money for the company and petty tyranny over the employees. If I had been one of those checked on, I certainly wouldn't have taken it. I criticized the whole thing to Mr. Ford, and he said, "Well, go ahead and stop it." So in 1921 I ended the Sociology setup as it existed, and Dean Marquis [its director] left the company. . . . the change was an easy one to make. This was my first big move in the company.[13]

This is reminiscence, and the eyes of many persons will be on the researchers at Dearborn to see what they do with the colorful tales of Harry Bennett in volume 2 of their new study, *Ford; the Times, the Man, the Company*.[14] How they will long to have what does not seem to exist: a verbatim transcript of the questions and answers in the lengthy Marcus interview of Bennett! One thing is certain. Unless *We Never Called Him Henry* is refuted almost paragraph by paragraph, the Henry Ford of Nevins and Hill's next volume will of necessity be a strikingly different man from the figure portrayed (even though with a latent "mean streak") in volume 1. The book cannot be ignored. In any attempted destruction of the sensational Bennett memoirs, oral-history testimony is bound to play a large role, as the Dearborn group seeks evidence in confirmation or rebuttal. It is to be hoped that, in this case in particular, interviewers will avoid leading and suggestive questions in their anxiety to fill voids in the Ford story.

Is oral history *uniquely* essential to twentieth-century historical writing? Is it helpful in writing picturesque, descriptive, genealogical, or factual prose about the people and events of the last five and a half decades? It cannot rank with an authentic diary, with a contemporary stock report, or with an eyewitness account transcribed on the day of the event. But it is probably to be ranked above contemporary hearsay evidence. Clearly it has some virtues. What does oral history give best: bare facts, sequence of events,

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 33.

[14] By Allan Nevins, with the collaboration of Frank Ernest Hill (New York, 1954). There is no discussion of the matter in the appropriate chapter, "The Company and the Worker," or elsewhere. The Bennett memoirs are not listed in the bibliography, nor cited in the footnotes. The authors show their feelings toward Bennett, however, in a footnote (p. 563), which refers obliquely to a "malicious statement" which once "appeared in the writings of the ineffable Harry Bennett." Bennett joined Ford's staff after the close of World War I, the point at which this book closes. Yet the sociology department, discussed in the text and mentioned by name, is not listed in the index to *Ford*. The claims of Bennett in this instance, as in others, must be considered by all close observers of the postwar years of Henry Ford.

causality, prime factors, statistics, long-dead emotions and motivations, synthesis, or mature interpretations? Who can say?

Speculation is interesting, but close examination of the one major book that is based extensively on the testimony from oral history may be more fruitful. The Nevins and Hill book on Ford devotes 186 out of its 1,449 footnotes, or 13% of the total, to oral history reminiscences. How much of the approach used in undocumented areas is due to this type of material cannot be determined.[15] Nor can one say with any certainty how much the *now* well-known world significance of the great automobile manufacturer influenced this treatment of his *early* years. It may be important that by very rough count, only about 66 of the 1,449 footnotes cite manuscript letters written by contemporaries, certainly far fewer than those citing oral history.

An analysis of the material in the *Ford* text credited to oral-history reminiscences[16] proved rewarding (although quite subjective, of course) and turned out somewhat as follows: vital facts, 57 footnotes, or 31% of all oral-history material cited; facts, 66, or 35%; opinion, 25, or 13%; descriptive or picturesque material, 23, or 12%; corroborative evidence, 11, or 6%; and genealogical information, 4, or 2%. It appears from this informal survey that oral history contributed *66% factual material*, while other types of material drawn from oral history totaled only 33%. This result was not anticipated. It had been idly assumed that from oral-history reminiscences would be drawn picturesque, humorous, descriptive, or not particularly important small details. Instead, much of the book's basic narrative, far more than the 13% figure indicates, came from interview material. Many anecdotes, colorful and space consuming, were quoted from reminiscences. Yet less than 40 of the 196 persons interviewed in the oral-history program

[15] Oral history did not guide the authors to many manuscript sources, although in some instances it may perform this service for others. Most oral-history citations in *Ford* are to facts or details rather than single items.

[16] The authors cite oral history as follows: Theodore Mallon, *Reminiscences*. Page numbers are usually omitted. The book reveals that by March 1953 the Oral History Section had conducted 386 interviews with 196 persons and had processed 17,500 pages of transcript. Reminiscences average 90 pages per person, but they vary greatly in length. Page citations would have been helpful additions. (It appears that these averages may have some validity: about 2 interviews per person, 45 pages of transcript per interview. At 250 words to the double-spaced typed page, this is 11,250 words per interview for the interviewee alone. This would be about 63 minutes of talking by the interviewee per interview at, to pick a figure, 181 words per minute. These are only rough estimates.) For an excellent article describing the oral-history technique used at the Ford Motor Company Archives, see Owen W. Bombard, "A New Measure of Things Past," *American Archivist*, 18:123-132 (April 1955).

seem to have contributed significantly to the text of volume 1 of the *Ford* book.

Mr. Nevins is undoubtedly correct in his assertion that the reminiscences often "imparted life and meaning to the skeletal materials furnished by correspondence and account books," especially since so little manuscript correspondence is cited. Oral history, he adds, was "pure gold for the historian." [17] Moreover, "These memoirs, packed with intimately recalled detail, are of inestimable aid to the historian in certain areas of the past where contemporary documentation is sparse or completely lacking." [18] Yet it will be seen that the authors of *Ford* have been careful to label information from oral history as such, most of the time in the text itself.

For example, the exact words of a reminiscence are quoted verbatim fairly often, with such introductory comment in the text as: "said Mrs. Ruddiman in describing the scene as Henry and Clara told her about it" (p. 117); "his sister recalled in 1951" (p. 106); "Henry's sister Margaret states that" (p. 111); "Henry's sister has deflated this account" (p. 105); "Wandersee in his memoir emphasizes" (p. 271, note); and "So Pring states — it is the impression an intelligent workman received of what was happening higher up" (p. 212). Even without verbatim quotations the oral-history evidence is usually labeled as such in the text, thus: "as Barthel says he did" (p. 166); and "Barthel, whose statement accords with other evidence, says . . ." (p. 213).

Such qualifying words in the text, sometimes augmented with similar limiting phrases in the footnotes, make one wonder how confident the authors are of the overall accuracy of evidence from oral history. They seem to have distinct reservations on the assay of this "pure gold" of midcentury memory. On the other hand, they used oral-history testimony to produce dates (e.g., April 1, 1902),[19] and brief verbatim conversations are placed within quotes on the strength of 50-year memory,[20] even when the same source is found in "probable" error on a matter of fact only four pages later.[21] Without having viewed the original evidence, one does not find it possible to evaluate the skill with which Nevins and Hill selected oral testimony, but they seem to have done an acceptable job of working with the immense quantity of evidence before them. Per-

[17] Nevins and Hill, *Ford*, p. viii.

[18] *Ford*, pp. 654-655.

[19] *Ford*, p. 230.

[20] A conversation between W. W. Pring and Ford in 1899, *Ford*, p. 180. See also pp. 332 and 389.

[21] The number of automobiles built by Ford in 1899-1900.

haps they would have done better had they exercised elsewhere their own judgment on one oral-history anecdote, about which they say, "A delightfully picturesque story this, which has been 'corroborated' by one or two other Ford veterans. But through the haze of forty years any man's recollection of past events is untrustworthy." [22]

The *permanence* of the transcript of an oral-history interview places special responsibilities on the craftsmen who evoke these reminiscences for deposit in libraries and archives. It was stated at the outset that *adherence to standards* is the chief virtue the true oral-history reminiscence has over an ordinary interview. *Minimum standards must be formulated, discussed, and accepted without delay.* Fourteen items seem basic. They are urged at this time on those operating oral-history projects and on their staffs of interviewers.

Standards for the Manufacture of Reminiscences With a Recording Device

The following ethical and procedural standards are suggested for the guidance of organizations and individuals planning to use recording devices on a regular basis for the production of oral-history reminiscences. They are designed (a) to keep the person interviewed from wasting valuable time, (b) to attract further financial support from foundations and other sources of funds, (c) to keep historical researchers of the future from condemning the product of historian-interviewers of today, and (d) to protect the public from receiving misleading or false information about the past.

1. Original tapes or disks need not be preserved, provided that competent stenographers transcribe the texts. If short extracts are being preserved in order that future generations may have samples of the interviewee's voice, they should be made on 33 1/3 r.p.m. disks or with an expensive, high-fidelity tape-recording machine similar to those used by radio stations. (Posterity should not be given a low-frequency, distorted voice, which friends and contemporaries could not recognize without guidance.) [23]

[22] P. 369. For what seems to be a recollection strongly influenced by intervening events, see Rockelman's direct quotation of Henry Ford's alleged remark on how his car would promote international neighborliness and prevent strikes and wars. (ca. 1907) p. 332.

[23] If there is doubt about the quality of the tape recorder, a "police line-up" type of test should be run with it, to judge whether or not close friends can pick out one another's voices from groups of six, all reading the same passage. Some tape-recorder

2. Typed transcripts should bear the following identification: name of person interviewed; name, age, and occupation of person interviewing; date and time of each section of the interview; specific place where each interview was conducted; and names of persons editing and typing the manuscript.

3. Interviewers should place at the beginning of the typed manuscript a brief, factual, and preferably chronological survey of important activities and accomplishments of the person interviewed. In the case of very famous persons, one or more citations to sketches of the person's career in standard volumes like *Who's Who in America* or *Current Biography* will be satisfactory.

4. Interviewers should place at the front of each typed transcript a brief statement indicating why the person was contacted originally (*i.e.*, At whose request? As part of an overall project?). This statement should indicate whether the person interviewed was informed beforehand of the portion of his career of major interest to the oral-history project. Early questions in the interview should be: "Will you please state, simply for the guidance of historians in coming generations, what, if any, scrapbooks, newspapers, books, or other materials you consulted to refresh your memory in preparation for this interview?" And, "What persons did you question in order to refresh your memory since consenting to this interview?"

5. At the conclusion of the interviewing sessions, the interviewer may write a page or more describing the manner in which the interview progressed, the attitude of the person being questioned, his evasiveness, forcefulness, friendliness, hesitancies, and so forth, as well as his physical appearance and clothes. (Researchers going

characteristics to be checked for when purchasing are: foot-operated switch; input for radio; accessory cords; microphone extension cord; conference and speech microphones and a microphone mixer for use with groups; space for transporting tapes; dual or single tracking; fast (20-1) forward and reverse speeds; frequency range of over 8000 c.p.s. at 7.5 in. per sec.; portability if desired; full erasability; amplifier wattage; output jacks for headphones and external speakers; earphones for stenographer; "magic eye" or neon lighted volume-level indicator; 7 inch reel capacity; footage consumption per hour at speed desired (7.5, 3.75, or 1.875 in. per sec.); extension arms for using N. A. B. standard reels of 10½ in. dia.; general ease of threading; footage time indicator; and editing key for recording during playback. Tape costs less than $5.00 for 1,200 ft., and wholesale prices are the realistic going prices. Tape can be erased repeatedly or cut and spliced at will. A tape recorder is a very simple machine to learn to use; 9-year-old children have picked up the skill quickly when around a machine for a few days.

The difficulties experienced by the Opinion Research Corporation in 1949 when conducting 4-minute interviews with gas station attendants are no longer typical, and their conclusion should be noted: "We are enthusiastic about the tape recorder method." Joseph C. Bevis, "Interviewing with Tape Recorders," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 13:629-634 (Winter 1949-50).

through files in later years will find many names of interviewees about whom they will know nothing at all.)

6. The words of the person interviewed should be typed exactly as spoken, *or* exactly as corrected by him later. Which procedure should be followed may vary from case to case. But the final transcript should tell explicitly which was done and indicate the general extent of the changes made after the interview (*i.e.*, in grammar, a few facts, or in substance).

7. Final typed interviews should include *both* the questions and the answers.

Without the questions an otherwise important interview will lose much of its value to historical researchers of later generations. Persons from several disciplines consulted by the present writer are unanimous on this point.[24] Psychologists, following the lead of Carl Rogers and others, differentiate between *directive* and *nondirective* interviews, but the difference, while instructive and pertinent, is too complex to show the full contrast between a "good" and a "bad" oral-history interview.

In a poor interview, one which will result in a transcript presenting maximum difficulty to the researcher, both the questions and the interspersed comments of the interviewer may be editorialized or strongly patterned in nature. The interviewer may often praise or tactfully quarrel with what is said, passing judgment quickly, perhaps at the request of the interviewee. He may show by his attitude either elation or boredom. Even his gestures may betray him. He asks so many detailed questions that the interviewee seldom can take the conversational lead. Subjects interesting to the interviewer take up pages; subjects of deep significance — especially flashes of brilliant synthesis of events — take very few pages. As Stuart A. Rice observed some years ago, ". . . data obtained from an interview are as likely to embody the preconceived ideas of the interviewer as the attitudes of the subject interviewed." [25]

[24] Particularly helpful were Ernest R. Hilgard, Stanford University; Nellie Woodward, executive director, Family and Children's Agency, San Francisco; and Milton G. Holmen, Psychological Corporation of America, New York City. Edgar E. Robinson and Edgar B. Wesley read early drafts of the manuscript to my profit; thoughtful letters from Solon J. Buck and Clifford L. Lord in 1952 sharpened my thinking in this area.

[25] Stuart A. Rice, ed., *Methods in Social Science* (University of Chicago Press, 1931), p. 561. On directive vs. nondirective interviewing, see Carl Rogers, *Counseling and Psychotherapy* (Boston, 1942), and "The Non-Directive Method for Social Research," *American Journal of Sociology*, 50:279-283 (1945). Robert K. Merton and Patricia L. Kendall describe a type of interview somewhat akin to that required for Oral History in "The Focused Interview," *ibid.*, 51:545-547 (1946). Still important in the family counseling field is Annette Garrett, *Interviewing; Its Principles and*

The good oral-history interviewer conceals his personal feelings so far as he can. He keeps the interviewee from realizing when he has been trite or obvious. As Arthur Krock has said, "The only [interviewing] 'strategy' I use is not to frighten off the subject by indicating that he has told me something of greater importance than he realizes." [26] The competent historian-interviewer avoids leading questions — those suggesting their own answers — and he tries very hard to be a friendly but an almost "faceless" person. Naturally, this is a most difficult type of interview to conduct, requiring great skill, experience, and control of one's emotions. The interviewer must be an actor and a good one. Yet it is precisely this interview, probably with a somewhat patterned but not editorial approach, that will bring to the final oral-history transcript the most satisfying historical reminiscence. A more accurate and reliable job will result when the interviewee knows little more about the life, thoughts, desires, and prejudices of the historian-interviewer *after* the interview than he did before it began. The pattern of his ideas will then be more likely to be his own.

The questions and interjections of the interviewer *must* appear on final typed interviews of real importance. The historian will not be able to discern the full story of the interview without them. Why do certain proper names appear in the manuscript? Why was the subject changed abruptly at one key point? Why was one event or person compared with another quite remote in time and space?

The historian of future decades can only guess at the real characteristics of the interviewee at the time of the interview if he lacks the *whole* record. Did the great man evade questions? Did he make serious errors, in spite of his eminence, and did the interviewer take it on himself to correct these blunders? Whose were certain key words which entered the conversation, words like "pacifist" or "Hoover" in the interview of Norman Thomas at Columbia University, for example. Surely the questions are nearly as valuable as the answers, and we should almost always have them. Still, when an interview is to be printed primarily for entertainment or literary reasons, as has been partially the case in *American Heritage* presentations from Columbia University files, questions may be dropped.

8. Persons to be interrogated should be asked to agree before being interviewed at length (at much effort and expense) that they

Methods (Family Service Association of America, 1942). A pioneer essay on personnel interviewing appears in F. J. Roethlisberger and W. J. Dickson, *Management and the Worker* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1938).

[26] Quoted in Harral, *Successful Interviewing*, p. 130.

will not print as memoirs or autobiography — or in any other form for profit — the final transcript or a reasonable facsimile thereof for a period of 5 years. (These persons are not entitled to the services of the interviewer as a free ghost writer.) While interviewees may, in most cases, be given the first carbon copy of the interview, the text itself shall, by signed, formal agreement, become the property of the oral-history organization. Subject to any limitations placed on its use, the original transcript shall be open on an agreed date to all qualified researchers on an equal basis.

9. Persons interviewed should be requested to sign a release granting to all researchers the legal right to quote from their transcript. This agreement should state that the interviewee's intent is that its provisions be binding on his heirs and descendants. Permission should also be granted to photostat, microfilm, or otherwise reproduce part or all of the transcript for purposes of convenient research. Yet in no case should the text or chapter-length extracts be reproduced for profit without the consent of the interviewee or his heirs. (The researcher might well be shown a copy of this provision before being permitted to read the transcript.)

10. The existence of a transcribed interview should be announced immediately on its completion through the "new acquisitions" or "historical notes" sections of one or more of the nationally circulated historical or archival journals. The announcement should give the exact date on which the transcript will be open to use by scholars. The transcript should remain closed to all researchers, usually including the person conducting the interview, until the agreed date. Closed interviews should be closed to all, and not opened periodically at the whim of the interviewee, the interviewer, or some third person. (Yet if an oral-history project should conduct a series of interviews as part of a specific piece of research and writing, the transcripts might be limited to the exclusive use of the research staff members until the completion of the indicated volume or study. After that time, other researchers might be admitted on an equal basis.)

11. Oral-history project directors should make every effort to persuade interviewees to set early dates for the release of the transcript. Closed portions should be typed separately, if possible, in order that nonsecret material may receive early use. (Interviewers will have little incentive to do a good job on a transcript which will be opened only in their dotage or after their death.)

12. Persons conducting oral-history projects should make every legitimate effort to persuade interviewees to augment their great

service to historians by depositing their personal manuscripts in an appropriate library. Eagerness to build local manuscript collections should not blind directors to their obligation, as scholars and archival builders, to steer manuscripts to collections where they will supplement important holdings already on hand.

13. In order to reward interviewers for their efforts in preparing a thorough interview, authors should footnote from typed oral-history transcripts as follows: Interview of John Smithfield by Edgar A. Columbus, Louisville, Kentucky, August 12, 1952 (Ford Archives), p. 76. (The interviewer who prepares carefully and interviews faithfully is something of an author himself, and deserves credit for a job well done.) As the term gains in stature among historians, citations of standardized interviews may begin: Oral History Interview of. In such citations neither italics nor quotation marks should be used, for these are manuscripts, not books or articles.

14. The directors of oral-history projects have an obligation to train staff members in interviewing techniques and in historical background material before permitting them to interview persons of great stature in the making of twentieth-century history. (Few men and women will want to submit to more than one series of oral-history interviews. A poor job can neither be rewritten nor repeated. This places a heavy obligation on those systematically interviewing former legislators, judges, or statesmen.) Graduate schools may eventually wish to give seminar credit for the total interview process, involving as it will: (1) background preparation, (2) training in interview techniques, (3) writing a biographical sketch and a descriptive essay, and (4) editing and supervising the typing of the final typescript.

American historians owe a great debt to the pioneers who faced and surmounted the financial and technical problems of creating oral history. They have put thousands of hours and many thousands of dollars of foundation and private money into their task. Their young industry has been a going concern in several oral-history projects and at least three States,[27] and it may spread, as finances permit, to some State and even county historical societies, where it may prove to be a process of great merit in the discovery of unwritten State and local history. For the historical societies these ver-

[27] The oral-history projects at Columbia University and the Ford Archives, Dearborn, Michigan, have been the most elaborate and best financed. Some interviewing with recorders has been done at the Wisconsin State Historical Society and elsewhere. Interviews by the oral-history section of the Ford Archives are bound and indexed, contain photographs of the persons interviewed, and are edited to arrange the individual narrative in chronological order of events.

batim reminiscences may help fill the void created by the passing of the habit of keeping diaries, and by the inhibiting effect of the long-distance telephone on personal correspondence.

Some years ago many a young industry came to agree on basic standards for its chief product. We are fortunate to have standard gages for railroads, standard typewriter keyboards, standard reinforcing steel bars, and, since 1941, standard screw threads in England and America.[28] Oral-history reminiscence manufacturing has now reached the point where it, too, should standardize. Oral-history transcripts should all have certain minimum characteristics. Uniformity in the mechanics of their preparation and transcription, as well as in their availability, is vital.

From the foregoing, certain conclusions seem warranted:

1. The interview method of obtaining facts for scholarly volumes is neither new nor revolutionary.
2. Interviewing can produce unreliable evidence, however, if it is conducted without careful observance of ethical and procedural standards.
3. Oral history has already contributed significantly to one documented volume on the life and times of a major figure of the twentieth century.
4. Minimum standards for oral-history interviewing can be formulated. If widely applied, they could raise oral-history interviews in stature as historical sources.
5. The 14 points of the "Standards for the Manufacture of Reminiscences With a Recording Device" contain minimum suggestions which should be adopted at once by present and future oral-history projects, by their interviewers, and, where applicable, by their future interviewees.
6. Oral-history reminiscences *can* be worthwhile, but only if they are prepared with educated care and used with scholarly caution.

A handful of the members of the historical and archival professions are convinced of the value of oral history. If the remainder — the doubters — are to be won over, the reminiscence-manufacturing industry must set and maintain high and uniform standards for its final product. That product is *not* the book that the oral-history promoter may have in mind when interviews are conducted.

The true oral-history product is the final typed memoir, the faithfully produced and standardized reminiscence, deposited in the archives for later generations.

[28] Microfilm publication of doctoral dissertations in this country, now being done in a uniform manner for over 50 graduate schools, promises as a byproduct to bring with it eventual standardization on some phases of form and footnoting. See the present writer's "Microfilm Publication of Doctoral Dissertations," American Association of University Professors, *Bulletin*, 39 (Autumn 1953), and "Doctoral Dissertations and the Stream of Scholarship," *College and University*, 28 (October 1952).