

# NEW YORK TRANSIT MUSEUM

130 Livingston Street, 10<sup>th</sup> Floor, Brooklyn, New York 11201

## Transportation Stories: Developing Oral History Collections

IATM Skillbridge Fellowship  
Final Report

March 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015

**Home Museum:** New York Transit Museum

**Home Museum Fellows:**

Polly Desjarlais, Senior Educator  
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**Host Museum:** London Transport Museum

**Host Museum Coordinator:**

Elizabeth Scott, Curator

**Fellowship Completed:**

January 19<sup>th</sup> - January 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015

## ***Introduction***

Two representatives, Desiree Alden and Polly Desjarlais from the New York Transit Museum (NYTM) completed a week long fellowship in January 2015, hosted by the London Transport Museum (LTM). The purpose of the fellowship was to learn how LTM have developed procedures and guidelines for the collection of oral histories and how they have utilized them in exhibits and educational programming. Oral history recordings are used in many different ways; as a basis for research into real personalities and historical context; as integral elements of exhibitions, where voice and video enhance and illustrate the content in interesting and creative ways; or as elements of marketing and advertising campaigns for a museum itself. LTM was selected as the host museum due to the similarities shared between our museum missions and our goals to collect, educate and interpret the story of urban transportation for our audiences. LTM has also made strides in the collection, exhibition and usage of oral histories in their educational programming.

LTM currently has about 300 oral history interviews in its collection, along with many other audio clips, vox pops, ambient sounds, that form their Sound Recordings Collection. LTM place a high value on what oral histories can add to the other collections they hold. They recognize that these interviews are a wealth of information that might exist only with the individual narrators themselves, and that this information adds context and emotion and color to an object, a photograph, or an idea. They have made collection of oral histories a priority in the ongoing institutional history of the museum, its volunteer body and Transport for London itself, making sure that as key members of staff retire, or buildings are sold and people are moved, that they are capturing these events to be preserved for future generations.

This report outlines the experience and lessons learned from LTM, giving NYTM the ability to formulate new ideas and change our thinking on how we can develop and integrate an ongoing oral history collection. Though we have collected in the past, the forth-coming exhibition *Bringing Back the City*, is an opportunity to reconsider and revitalize our efforts to document the human stories relevant to our collections.

## ***Key Takeaways from the London Transport Museum***

### ***1. The lives of real people lend authenticity to learning experiences***

The Learning (Education) Department at LTM has a few core aims, one of which is that all of its programming, for families, schools and the community be rooted in the collections. The oral history collection plays an important and ongoing role in informing learning sessions run by the museum. The Learning team also utilizes the oral histories embedded in the permanent and temporary exhibits to inspire visitors of all ages. Staff from the Learning Department is often the interface between the museum, the general public, and workers from Transport for London, so they can and do suggest potential subjects and people for the oral history collection.

The Learning Team is made up of four full-time members of staff, some project-funded positions, many freelance educators and even more volunteers, young and old. One group of freelancers that the Learning Department works closely with is actors from the Spectrum Drama Company. These actors lead programs and participate in character encounters in the museum where a school group or family will meet a character based on a real person that the actor has researched using the museum's archive and collections.

In developing their characters, the actors can explore objects and documents like diaries and personal papers from the museum's archives, and they also have access to recorded oral histories, and sometimes a transcript, of actual bus drivers and conductors and train drivers, people with real stories full of drama and insight. This lends authenticity to the characters and highlights the idea that all people – famous or not – have a story and life worth telling. Access to true, first-hand accounts from a specific time period, great historic event, or even historic vehicles, adds authenticity and detailed contextual interest otherwise absent. It also allows educators to move beyond the objects and stories on display in the permanent galleries to dive deeper into what is tucked away in the archives.

## **2. *Oral histories can connect with a wide audience***

The permanent galleries at the LTM are awash with sounds and voices that emanate from the exhibits themselves. Upstairs with the Victorian vehicles and early train cars, there are frosted glass panels that display characters from London's past, like a road sweeper, an omnibus driver, and a train driver, who tell stories about their daily work lives. Though some of these stories are too old to have been based on actual oral histories collected by the museum, they are grounded in true lives, and once again provide the visitor with another way to engage with the content. The act of listening to information, rather than having to read it, provides new entry points to audiences that may not otherwise be able to engage fully, especially people who are visually impaired or families with young children.

Another way that the learning department engages with audiences is through its many sessions specifically for schools. *The Story of Joe Clough* is a school program that introduces students to London's first black bus driver who left Jamaica for London and on to the battlefields of World War I. This project was researched using the collections, by one of the museum's freelance educators. She did not have an oral history of Joe Clough himself but pieced together his story from personal papers, diaries and the oral histories of contemporaries and witnesses. It is exciting and meaningful for children to know that Joe was a real person whose life story has been preserved and presented in a museum. They can more easily make connections to their own lives and the people in them when a real person has been brought to life by a skilled educator.

NYTM runs a very similar educational program for schools called *Journey to the Past*, wherein a costumed educator plays the role of a character from New York's transportation history, and engages visitors in our authentic space. However, even though the characters are thoroughly researched, they are not based on the lives of real people as would be told in an oral history interview, even though there are such a wealth of interesting stories at our fingertips that can add richness and depth. The stories that our costumed educators tell are varied in their aims; it depends on the age group of the students and the character themselves, but all of them compliment the programs educational goals, and provide meaningful connections to our collection for a wide variety of learners -both typical, general education students and those with special learning needs. These are characters that the children can talk with and question; they wear authentic uniforms and use authentic language; and they stay 'in character' at all times when engaging. This experience can be very powerful for students, as well as the general public who may stand and watch these programs from a short distance. Creating these characters from the lives and words of real people will only add to their credibility and their reach.

Family audiences also have chances to interact with the oral history collection through the museum's permanent galleries. In recent weeks the LTM Learning Department has deployed volunteers close to a character from one of the frosted glass panels, and provided visitors, both young and old, with the chance to dress up like that particular character, in replica costumes and with replica props. All the information on the glass panels comes from oral history interviews in the collection. As children and their adult caregivers are experiencing what it was like to wear a uniform or carry a broom, the volunteer educators can give them some more in-depth information about the jobs being described, adding the learning component to the fun connections already being made. In fact, these interactions turn the memories of real workers into a tangible experience for a family. A particularly popular character is the Victorian road sweeper who had to clean horse manure from the streets of London!

### **3. *Exhibitions can provide opportunities to use oral histories in a meaningful and creative way***

Last year LTM was challenged by the task of presenting an exhibit about London and the First World War to children and families. This exhibit titled *Goodbye Piccadilly* used video, artifacts, photographs, and personal stories. These personal stories of Londoners in the transport workforce during the war, inspired the Curatorial and Learning teams on how to deliver content in a meaningful way. For example, a female bus conductor in 1914 told an interviewer how during blackouts some passengers would try and cheat their fare by handing the conductor the wrong coins and how they had to learn to distinguish the different coins by feel alone. In the exhibit, they installed an interactive whereby visitors can put their hands inside boxes to try to figure out what coin it is they are feeling. They turned a person's recorded memories into a palpable experience that gives children and families' insight into what life was really like in 1914 London.

Embedded in the *Goodbye Piccadilly* exhibit are videoed oral histories collected by the museum over the last few decades and specifically for the exhibit itself. Curators pulled out the interviews that they thought would be most engaging to help tell the stories and interpret the content. In inter-department content team meetings, themes and learning objectives were decided upon. Educators listened to the chosen oral histories and suggested parts of these interviews that would work in different sections of the exhibit. Contemporary oral histories were also collected to address specific themes like the role of women in the transport workforce.

The videos of oral histories in the exhibit are presented in lively and engaging ways. The museum asked students from St. Martins School of Art to create animations inspired by what they saw and heard in these interviews. These animated interpretations of the oral histories have worked well with family audiences, especially children, and led to further exploration and engagement within the exhibit. This helps illustrate the point that different interpretations of information, whether its information about London during the First World War or what it was like to travel on a steam train, can appeal to different audiences – animating a person's memories, or creating a video of young people giving voice to personal letters and other papers, are creative ways to interpret the content making it accessible to a wider, more varied audience. Whatever has been created as a part of the process of interpretation has been accessioned into the London Transport Museum's collection for future generations to enjoy and use.

#### **4. *Oral history provides an opportunity for community engagement and conversations about social issues***

As a part of their community programming, and tied in to the museum's 2014 focus on the start of the First World War, the learning department sent an educator to bus garages around the city to interview women bus drivers about their work. They connected these interviews with *Goodbye Piccadilly*, and the *Battle Bus* project, which tell the stories of London's home front and the role of buses in the war effort, and the advance of women into the transport workforce. In visiting current female bus drivers and other women in a largely male workforce, the museum attempted to get them involved in their own history, and found that many of these women did these jobs because their mothers or grandmothers had been in transportation before them, inspiring them to continue the family tradition. Oral histories of these women were collected and accessioned into the museum's collection.

In another community-based project, the museum partnered with a local arts organization on the *Cabbie Shelter's Project*, which focused on these historic structures, dotted around London, which house small kitchens and are a rest space for London's famous Hackney Cab drivers. These shelters are part of a very exclusive club since the general public is not allowed inside them. One of the artists involved in the project spent a long time in the shelters talking with and conducting oral history interviews of the drivers. She was deeply interested in their lives, particularly the very arduous training that they go through before becoming Hackney cab drivers, called The Knowledge. Most of the hours of interviews were then transcribed and the artist put together a one-man, four-act play using the actual words of the cabbies paying "tribute to the significant, yet often invisible, service and knowledge of the cab driver." Preparation for the play was long, grueling to learn for the actor, and then performed in a cabbie shelter for very intimate public audiences. A video was made of one of the performances and screened at the museum. The museum will also accession 10 of the oral histories for its collection and a copy of all of the work produced from this project.

#### **5. *The importance of policy and developing a collection***

Various meetings with the Curatorial Department were held discussing general collection management, storage, and strategies used by LTM. The most influential discussion on oral history collections came during a discussion on a grant recently awarded to LTM for a born digital project. This project, awarded in 2014 and concluding in 2016, will allow LTM to create long term strategies for maintaining collections of born digital material that come into their collection. A specific piece of the project details the collecting, cataloging, storage, and accessibility of their oral history recordings. By March 2016 they hope to have at least 40 oral histories available online. These 40 recordings will be comprised of selecting and updating 20 oral histories in the current collection of 300 and adding 20 new oral histories to be selected, conducted, and added to the collection. Currently, oral histories in their collection have been underutilized by the general public due to limited accessibility and knowledge that the collection exists. Overall, this project will enable them to create new cataloging guidelines, agreed upon set standards, and development of better access to born digital materials as a whole.

In researching and writing the proposal for the project LTM learned the first step is to review existing collection policies, including digital preservation and creating a new policy for born digital material and storage management for various formats. This

included consideration for creating access copies and preservation copies, as well as the ability to maintain the software needed to access various file types. They also reviewed existing catalog records to help develop new guidelines for cataloging, including a set of guidelines for oral history collections specifically. In terms of the work performed during the oral history component of the grant, a project curator, along with selected volunteers, will conduct interviews, transcribe summaries of the recordings, and catalog them into their IMS. They will utilize an oral history packet developed by LTM that includes permissions and consent forms, interview proposal forms, best practices for interviewing, and cataloging and transcription guidelines. These materials were created with the help of attending the Oral History Society training at the British Library.

Overall, LTM has had an ongoing oral history collection for the past few decades, but the last few years have been a turning point for them in recognizing the importance of personal stories within the context of enriching the collection and its use for exhibit and educational purposes. LTM has demonstrated the importance of having a policy in place for collecting oral histories in an ongoing manner, and that this material can be used and interpreted in a huge range of varied and nuanced ways. From research material for educators and the general public, to interactive exhibit content, to encouraging direct engagement and interpretation from the community, to capturing the lives of real people and their influence on London and its transportation. LTM's oral history collection, drawn in large part from Transport for London, has given workers a chance to tell their stories, validate their real-life experiences, and leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

### ***Oral History Practice at the New York Transit Museum***

- ***Past and Current Usage***

NYTM has a small oral history collection, 75 of which were captured in 1989 as a collaboration with City Lore, a New York City-based arts organization.. In 2003 magnetic tape recordings of these oral histories were digitized. Most recently, interviews of an architectural historian, an urban planner and several employees of the station were collected for use as 'electronic docents' in a temporary exhibition celebrating the centennial of Grand Central Terminal, in 2013. Though they were not oral history interviews, as per the Oral History Association's guidelines, visitor response to these electronic docents was very positive since they could ask them a variety of questions to which they would answer, lending authenticity to the information and a creative way of delivering it.

The NYTM permanent exhibit 'On the Streets' traces the history of surface transportation, and features the spoken words of individuals who have worked for the department of buses. Visitors can press a button on their life-sized photographs and hear their stories. Again, they don't qualify as oral histories exactly and were not added to the museum's collection, but they are real workers describing the actual work that they did. Visitors enjoy listening to these recordings and they provide engagement for non-readers, people with visual impairments, and so on, as well as typical learners. The acoustics, however, can sometimes be very challenging and make them hard to discern amongst the ambient noise of the space they are in.

- *Future Usage*

In meeting with members of the LTM Curatorial Department it was a prevailing theme in conversations that policy should be the first consideration before starting an oral history collection from the ground up. Collecting must fit within the scope of the museum mission and as a part of what is outlined in the institutional collecting policy. Oral histories and sound recordings are not specifically identified in the current NYTM collection policy under archival collections which states that we collect:

*“Historic records of enduring value from the MTA and its operating agencies and their predecessor agencies and private companies, published books and periodicals, including rare or historic materials, are acquired for research use in the NYTM Archives.”*

It becomes apparent that specifics should be considered and has become a partial reason for rethinking current policy. NYTM recently decided to focus on creating a long term 5 year collection plan project, potentially starting in 2016. This plan will help us reconsider and update our existing policies as well as create more specific department goals for long term collection management. Besides creating new collection policies, for example, a born digital collections policy, it will also outline areas of the current collection that should be prioritized, such as an oral history collection and a subcommittee devoted to collection development. In following LTM’s lead it would be our recommendation to consider adding oral histories as a specific component of our archival collecting policy and long term project.

With the addition of an oral history collection, we can then start to determine ways they can be rooted into various grant proposals, exhibits, programming, research, enriching the collection, and user accessibility. It is our recommendation that NYTM formalizes a subcommittee consisting of at least, but not limited to, one representative from the Archives, Curatorial, and Education Departments. This committee’s responsibility will be to establish a selection process for collecting interviews based on representation of the transit workforce, the general public, exhibition potential, and institutional memory. This committee will also create a NYTM version of an oral history packet (see attached example packet) to be utilized as the set forms, standards, and guidelines for conducting and storing oral history recordings.

Towards the end of this year we are opening an exhibition entitled *Bringing Back the City*, about how the Metropolitan Transportation Authority prepares for and handles disasters. The exhibit will concentrate on several serious events over the last fourteen years, that have had a significant impact on the city and the transit system; the terrorist attacks in 2001, the blackout of 2003, and big winter storms like Hurricane Sandy. The information and stories will, in part, be told by transit workers themselves, through videoed oral histories with the intention of maintaining these for the collection. The interviews are a central component to this exhibition, illustrating how these events affected the city, the workers who were battling to keep the transit system on its feet, as well as the passengers and other ordinary folk who experienced these events alongside them. This new exhibition is giving the museum an opportunity to begin collecting oral histories again, and to look for new ways to exhibit and interpret information and other material culture surrounding these events.

In April 2015, we will launch a story-collecting project as a part of a wider public program called Platform. The idea is to record the general public’s recollections of the

major events that are the focus of the up-coming exhibit. We will publish thought-provoking questions ahead of time so that on the night of the event participants come prepared with thoughtful and meaningful stories. The perspective of ordinary citizens provides insight, information and an emotional response unique to their experiences. They will help to inform content and keep information relevant and felicitous, as well as giving them an opportunity to have their voice heard, recorded and displayed in a major museum exhibition.

The Education Department will have an opportunity to create programs for families, and school sessions that utilize these new oral histories. We could look in-depth into the world of a Track Specialist or Maintenance of Way Supervisor, learning the details of some of the fascinating jobs people do, by listening to/viewing excerpts from the interviews and imagining we are doing these jobs ourselves; child-sized and adult-sized replica uniforms and props could be employed. This would work well for a family audience where the accompanying adults would play a role alongside their children. For older students, middle and high school, we could give them some real-world problem solving activity, based on the stories the exhibit is explaining, and then study the actual ways that problems and crises were solved as told by the workers themselves.

### ***Conclusion***

Oral History is the gateway to the human experience, “an opportunity for those people who have been ‘hidden from history’ to have their voice heard; a rare chance to talk about and record history face-to-face; a source of new insights and perspectives that may challenge our view of the past.” As a museum in a large urban community it is possible for us to reach the ordinary person and those voices that speak to a different experience than the workforce, giving us a really well-rounded perspective.

An Oral History collection makes a great deal of sense for transportation museums like NYTM and LTM because of the close relationship they have with the transit authorities who operate in these massive urban centers, and the accessibility of the workforce. These workforces are both very large and diverse with a plethora of jobs titles and experiences leading to a wealth of anecdotes and life-stories, themes and focus for community projects, exhibits, collections and programming.

The kind of work that the LTM is doing in the field of Oral History is inspiring to us across the pond in New York. Inter-departmental collaboration has produced creative and unexpected results in London and we hope to replicate these efforts at working across departments here in New York. This fellowship has enabled us to bridge our skills gap in the field of oral history, collaborate with colleagues, sharing ideas and expertise and begin a productive and reciprocal relationship with LTM.

### References

London Transport Museum Oral History Packet  
New York Transit Museum Collection Policy  
Oral History Society  
Oral History Association

## NYTM ORAL HISTORY SAMPLE PACKET

- Interviewee Proposal Form
  - Legal Release Form
  - Image Consent Form
- Cataloging Guidelines (PastPerfect Software)
  - Best Practices Guidelines

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## ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW PROPOSAL FORM

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Museum Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Form Submission: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Interviewee Telephone/Email Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed Date for Interview: \_\_\_\_\_

Please provide below a brief description of the interviewee: Informational background, connection to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority or other transit agencies, and/or any topical transit related experiences they may have.

Please provide below the reasons you think they are a candidate to be interviewed for the Oral History Collection. Consider the following questions: Is their story unique? Is their story underrepresented in the collection? Will their experiences highlight areas in upcoming or potential future exhibitions?

The Collection Department's Oral History Collection sub-committee will review your proposal for this interview and get back to you in a timely manner. Thank you for your submission.

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## INTERVIEW AGREEMENT FOR Oral History Interview Conducted by the New York Transit Museum

This agreement is entered into by \_\_\_\_\_, interviewee, and the New York Transit Museum. Both parties enter into this agreement in order to facilitate the future use of the oral history interview conducted on this date, \_\_\_\_\_, for research, historical, and educational purposes.

Audio and/or video recordings and transcripts resulting from interviews conducted by the New York Transit Museum become part of their permanent archival collections. They will be made available to members of the public and interested scholars. Typical uses may include publications, audio/video recording in all existing and future media, public programs, museum exhibits, web sites, online venues, and other media deemed appropriate.

Interviewee:

1. Consents to voluntarily participate in this interview as provided by this agreement.
2. Authorizes the New York Transit Museum to record, transcribe, and edit the interview, and to use and re-use the interview recording and transcript in whole or in part.
3. Understands that the New York Transit Museum shall have no obligation to use the interview and has no expectation of financial compensation for participation in this project.
4. Agrees to give and assign all rights, title, and interest, including copyright, of whatever kind from this interview to the New York Transit Museum. If you wish to limit access on your interview please state the conditions below.

State Conditions of Restriction: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Full Name of Interviewee (print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Full Name of Interviewer (print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City State Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
City State Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone/Email Contact

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone/Email Contact

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## IMAGE CONSENT FORM Oral History Interview

Photographs and/or film images resulting from interviews conducted by the New York Transit Museum become part of their permanent archival collections. They will be made available to members of the public and interested scholars. Typical uses may include publications, public programs, museum exhibits, web sites, online venues, and other media deemed appropriate.

I understand that the New York Transit Museum may edit images in whole or in part. I understand that I will not receive financial compensation for the use of these images in any format and that the New York Transit Museum shall have ownership of the images in perpetuity.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Full Name of Interviewee (print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City                      State                      Zip

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone/Email

The New York Transit Museum acknowledges receipt of the above consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signee for the New York Transit Museum

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name/Title

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## ORAL HISTORY CATALOGING GUIDELINES

The following are the guidelines for filling out the required fields in PastPerfect to catalog oral history collections. These are the fields that show up only in the oral history screen view in the archives catalog. Follow all previous steps in the archives catalog guidelines for other fields not in the oral history screen view. In the archives catalog edit mode of PastPerfect select the 'Oral History' button for default view when cataloging oral history material. When saved this screen view will automatically appear when the record is viewed.

### Scope & Content /Abstract Field

This field describes the recorded matter of the oral history. Provide a **summary** of the interview including the topics that are most relevant in the recording and the time codes for those topics of interest.

*Example: See attached example*

### Recording Media

Enter the original recording format. This field uses a drop down menu which has most recording formats for selection.

*Example: Cassette Tape or WAV File*

### Media Quantity

The numerical quantity of the media for an oral history.

*Example: 2 (for 2 Cassette Tapes or 2 WAV files)*

### Restrictions

Any restrictions or copyright information from donor or through the museum is entered here.

*Example: Any reproduction or use of the material must be approved by the donor.*

### Narrator's Name

The narrator is the person who was interviewed for the oral history. This field uses a Name Authority File, press F7 to access the file. If the name does not appear in the authority file you can add, edit, or delete entries in the authority file using the icons at the top of the screen. All entries must be entered as follows: last name, first name and middle name or initial. This field can also be linked to a contact record. Add the contact ID# or use the folder icon to search for the contact.

*Example: Doe, John Jane or Doe, John J.*

### Interviewer

This is the name of the person who conducted the interview. This field uses a Name Authority File, press F7 to access the file. If the name does not appear in the authority file you can add, edit, or delete entries in the authority file using the buttons at the top of the screen. All entries must be entered as follows: last name, first name middle name or initial.

*Example: Doe, John Jane or Doe, John J.*

**Interview Place**

Enter the name or location of the place where the interview was conducted. This should be written with the address or institution name and (city).

*Example: 370 Jay Street (Brooklyn, N.Y.) or New York Transit Museum (Brooklyn, N.Y.)*

**Interview Date**

Enter the date the interview was conducted. Format is mm/dd/yyyy

*Example: 02/23/2015*

**Length of Interview**

Enter the length of the interview using the format HH:MM:SS

*Example: 1 hour, 45 minutes, 25 seconds should be written as 01:45:25*

**Date Donor Form Signed**

Enter the date the donor signed the permissions forms for the oral history interview.

Format is mm/dd/yyyy

*Example: 02/23/2015*

**Transcriptionist**

Enter the personal name or agency name that transcribed the oral history interview. This field is controlled by an authority file, press F7 to access the file. To add, edit, or delete entries in the authority file, use the buttons at the top of the screen. All personal name entries must be entered as follows: last name, first name and middle name or initial. All corporate names should be written out as is found in LOC Name Authority Heading or as written.

*Personal Name example: Doe, John Jane or Doe, John J.*

*Agency Name example: City Lore, Inc. or StoryCorps*

**Transcript Location**

Enter the location of the transcript, physical or digital.

*Example: 130 Livingston/Archives/Row 7/Unit B/Shelf 2/Box 1*

*Example: P Drive*

**Transcript Review Date**

Enter the date the transcript was reviewed for accuracy. Format is mm/dd/yyyy

*Example: 02/23/2015*

**Recording List**

The recording list allows you to put in entries for specific subjects and time codes. To add to the Recording List, first make sure you have saved your new Archive record and are not in Edit Mode. Then click on the plus sign button above the Recording List. To add, delete or edit entries on the Oral History Recording List, click the file folder icon button. This screen also enables you to preview and print the recording list. This field allows you to input the following information: Media ID (Usually the name of the recording), Side (If physical format what side of tape), Start Time (subject start time), Subject (Description of subject discussed).

*Example:*

*Media ID: John Doe Tape 1*

*Side: 1*

*Start Time: 00:15:15*

*Subject: Metrocard changing the work of a station token booth operator.*

### **Other Guidelines to Follow**

- If a digital file is available for the oral history attach the file to the PastPerfect record using the media tab at the top of the record. This file will automatically be stored on the database server.
- Make sure that the permissions form signed by the donor is also attached to the accession record for the oral history in PastPerfect.
- The ability to attach an image is also available in the image management portion of the record. The image attachment should include both an image of the medium of the recording (if physical) as well as an image of the narrator (interviewee) if applicable.
- All oral history recordings should be under the Collection name: Oral History Collection
- Make note of the format you are cataloging to make sure we have the proper software to run a particular format.
- All summaries are abstracts, not full transcriptions.

### **Summary Example**

John J. Doe, born in New York City in 1955, lived in the borough of Brooklyn until the age of 18 when he graduated high school and moved to the borough of Manhattan. In 1980, John joined New York City Transit as a token booth operator at the South Ferry Station on the IRT Seventh Avenue Line. He retired as a station manager in 2015. In this interview, John discusses his early years in transit when the subway was in its decline in the early 1980s (00:04:30) as well as how happy he was to see the revitalization of the system going into the 1990s (00:08:45). John talks about his impressions of his job over the years. Including the slow change in his job as the Metrocard is introduced to the subway system in the mid-1990s (00:15:15) and the replacement of the token entirely in 2003. John talks of the differences in the new and old South Ferry stations (00:22:55) and the damage he witnessed after Hurricane Sandy in the new South Ferry station (00:26:45). John also discusses some anecdotal stories of his fellow station workers (00:31:00) and his retirement from transit after 35 years in service (00:35:45).

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## GUIDELINES AND BEST PRACTICES ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

### First Time Interviewers

- If possible seek training on conducting an oral history interview either from an outside source or by a trained member of the museum staff
- Familiarize yourself with the New York Transit Museum *Oral History Packet*
- Familiarize yourself with the recording equipment provided by the museum
- Learn about the person, project or topic you will be conducting the interview for to familiarize yourself with technical language, places, time periods, and for historical reference

### Planning an Interview

- Contact the potential interviewee
- Conduct a pre-interview to allow discussion on what material may be covered in the interview, the reasons this interview will become part of the museum collection, how the interview will take place, general running time of interview, and to inform the interviewee about legal release forms and rights
- Select a venue for the interview remembering that a quiet place is best for recording
- After the pre-interview make a list of potential questions to ask during the interview to outline and structure the conversation

### Conducting the Interview

- All interviewers should begin the session with an introduction, generally referred to as a 'Lead' which includes interviewer/interviewee names, date and time, and location
- Try to make the interviewee comfortable and remember to be respectful, a listener not a talker, nonjudgmental, and prepared
- Ask questions that are open, clear, and appropriate
- Use body language to encourage answers like nodding your head instead of saying filler responses such as 'yes' or 'I see' that may interrupt the interviewee story
- If conducting an interview with topical focus for an exhibit make sure to strike a balance that provides both specific accounts for the exhibit as well as a full perspective of the interviewee

### After the Interview

- Thank the interviewee for their time and have a natural closing conversation with them about the experience
- The recorded interview should be given to the archives with all essential paperwork, images, and information surrounding the interview
- The archives will store the recordings and maintain software for all viable recording formats
- The original recording will be the preservation copy and a duplicate copy will be made for access and as a back up to the original
- The recording will be cataloged into the archives database along with any material pertaining to the interview recording. The archivist will make sure a complete summary is made in the catalog record with sufficient time codes and topics of interests