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Oral history guide: Insights from the Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project and guidelines for beginning an oral history project

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Oral History Guide

Insights from the Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project and
Guidelines for Beginning an Oral History Project



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Fall 2014



Introduction to this Guide



Every person has a story to share, and oral history projects can tap into that information. There are many rules and guidelines people should follow while working on oral history projects, and not all of them are cut and dry. This guide will give you a glimpse into the process of creating the Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project and tips and sources for carrying out your own project.



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Overview of Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project



The Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project was born out of a desire to combine classwork with a product that would add to an existing archive. The Public History Master's program at UNI requires two internship components and many other programs, undergraduate and graduate, require them too. I chose to contact Tom Kessler of the The Postville Project (www.postvilleproject.org) to volunteer my time as internship credit. The Postville Project covers all topics related to the 'Postville Story.' That is, the events and circumstances preceding, during, and after the historic 2008 ICE Raid that occurred in Postville, Iowa. I had used the archive in my own research and believed that I could contribute to the site with the skills I had learned. After meeting with Tom Kessler, we decided to begin an oral history project that explored what it was like for residents to live and work in Postville while dealing with the vast changes over the last 25 years.

Initially, we had planned to complete the majority of the project during the summer. However, due to the amount of front-end work, which I will talk about in the next section of this guide, I did not begin interviews until late July. I have learned that in projects like these, you need to be flexible. You are relying on others for permission and help, people like the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and your interviewees. It can be stressful to not be fully in control of your project and the waiting game may become frustrating. All these obstacles you must overcome before the interviews (paperwork, planning, and correspondence) command a deep commitment to the project. As you will find out, beginning a project from scratch is a lot of work and so is adding to an established project.

Throughout the fall of 2014, I was able to conduct 11 interviews for the Community Voices project and have been transcribing them as I go. As a somewhat shy person, striking up a conversation with nearly complete strangers is not always easy. However, I have found that, given the chance, many people love to talk about their life. People experience life in many different ways, oral history is a fascinating way to understand and learn from others. The initial step to crafting your project is to choose a topic.

Choosing a Topic



When choosing a topic, you should have some goals in mind. Consider what you are going to do with the project when you are done. Ask yourself if there is a need for recording the experiences of people that pertains to a topic you are interested in. Write your ideas down and flesh them out. For feedback on your topic consult your supervisor or a professor to see if they have any suggestions on your topic choice and goals. Surf the internet to see if others have completed projects similar to yours. Now is the time to also consider your limitations. In Community Voices my parameters were time, location, and language. I knew that I was limited to two semesters of work, I could travel only within a certain distance to talk to people, and because I cannot speak Spanish, I was limited to interviewing residents who spoke English.

Something very important to consider is the background information needed to conduct any oral history project. You should have a pretty extensive background knowledge on your topic before you enter an oral history project. This knowledge should not be used to funnel your project in a certain direction, but it will help you understand the historical background of the experiences people are talking about. Also, memories can be spurred by certain events or by photographs, so having the background knowledge may be helpful if an interviewee's memory needs jogged. For your background knowledge consult primary sources like newspapers, magazines, or television shows from the time and read related scholarly articles or books. The American Folklife Center is a great resource for tips on choosing a topic and preliminary planning of oral history project, (<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/familyfolklife/oralhistory.html>).

At this point, you will also need to begin thinking about the forms you will need for the project. For the project you need a few legal documents- an informed consent and a deed of gift form. For the Institutional Review Board's application, according to your institution's standards, you will need a list of potential questions and a list of potential interviewees. For your interviewees you may want to develop a biographical data sheet that will help you get to know them a little better before the interview. (See the Appendix for examples of these forms.) The IRB will need to see all of your paperwork, but before designing your forms, you should take the IRB training in Human Participants Protections that most campuses offer online or through workshops. This training is important and everyone involved in the project should take it.

The Institutional Review Board



All academic institutions have an Institutional Review Board (IRB). The board is made up of faculty members who give students and faculty permission to conduct research where there may be potential risks for the participants, researcher, or the University. They make sure the researcher has fully thought of all avenues of the research and that everything complies with the ethical standards of the University. In general, oral history is not considered a high risk activity, but there have been some instances where well-meaning historians' projects have gone awry. For a particularly poignant example, visit the Chronicle of Higher Education's interactive website Secrets from Belfast (<http://chronicle.com/article/Secrets-from-Belfast/144059/>). Vetting your project through the IRB, professors trained in oral history techniques, and a supervisor that is IRB certified will help you avoid compromising your project or the reputation of the University, the interviewee, or yourself.

At UNI, the IRB is a part of the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs. Visit their website (<http://www.uni.edu/rsp/>) to learn more about the services they offer, the faculty involved in IRB, dates for IRB training and other trainings like Ethics in Scholarship, and the Standard Application for Human Participants Review form that you will need to fill out.

Getting Certified to Work with Human Participants



IRB training is a free services offered through the university or online. It only takes a couple hours with at the end you take a short quiz and you receive a certificate. The IRB needs to have your certificate on file when you submit the Standard Application for Human Participant Review. If you cannot attend the training on campus, there is an option to take it online through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI). If you choose to take it online, the certificate will be sent to the IRB electronically. For more information please refer to the Training in Human Participants Protections website (<http://www.uni.edu/rsp/irb-training>).

The Standard Application for Human Participants Review



The application process can be tedious, but is a necessary step along the way to beginning your project. This application documents every tiny detail about your project, and that is a good thing. This will help you define your goals and procedures if you haven't fully thought of them yet. The application, which can be found on the IRB website (<http://www.uni.edu/rsp/forms-documents>), will take you quite a bit of time to fill out. You should be very concise in your wording, but make sure that anyone reading it, even from another discipline, will be able to understand what you want to do, how you are going to go about doing it, and why. This process took me nearly one month. I worked closely with Tom Kessler, the supervisor of the Community Voices project, when filling out the application. I also had the Public History program director, Dr. Leisl Carr Childers, look over the application. If you have numerous people look it over your application, your chances of the IRB passing it are much higher.

After I turned in a draft of the application, there was a two week wait until the next meeting of the IRB. Check the dates that IRB will be reviewing applications so you know when you need to turn it in. Beforehand I contacted the IRB representative for the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences to see if my project needed full board review and to inquire when the board was meeting. It is good practice to do this, because chances are you will be emailing back and forth with at least one IRB representative throughout the application process and the duration of your project. After the board reviewed the application for the Community Voices project, they had a few questions that just required a little editing, but it was nearly a month and a half after the inception of the project that we were given the final 'okay' by IRB to be able to start interviewing. The take away points from this section are:

- ✿ Begin your application early
- ✿ Inquire with your college's IRB representative about meeting times
- ✿ Have your application reviewed by a few professionals
- ✿ Be prepared to answer follow-up questions and a lot of editing
- ✿ Have a flexible time schedule for your project

Making Connections with Interviewees



This aspect of the project can be a challenge, but it is very rewarding. Making contact with potential interviewees can happen numerous ways, and you will actually have to write out your plan for contacting people in the Standard Application for Human Participants Review. You have to think about your project, who is the closest to the subject you are interested in researching? For the Community Voices project, the goal was to talk to anyone who lives or works in or near Postville and would have experience the ‘Postville Story.’ That left an entire town open to me, however, many projects are much more pointed. Two things worked in my favor as I began the Community Voices project, my grandparents are residents of Postville so I had a connection to the town and my supervisor and I had a meeting early on with a contact from an organization in Postville who gave us many names of potential interviewees and opened many doors for us.

I have reached out to people through emails, phone calls, and letters. Once you have your first interview, it may be beneficial to ask that person if they have any contacts they would recommend to you. Then, if you choose to contact that person, you can say they were recommended by the mutual contact and they are more likely to talk to you. For the Standard Application of Human Participant Review, you will have to write up a script that you can use when contacting people. The script for Community Voices is located in the appendix. Be sure to practice this on someone who can give you feedback about it. Make sure it makes sense and accurately portrays what you want to do in your project. When I called some potential interviewees, I really had to sell the project. Many of the folks I talked to had never been involved in an oral history project and were a little skeptical of a stranger wanting to hear about their life. I just explained the project in great depth, let them know it would be public and that it was all completely voluntary. Never hide anything from an interviewee. You need to be straight forward with them, explain where the audio and transcript of their interview will be deposited and what it may be used for. Explain the forms they will need to sign, usually the informed consent and deed of gift, and why they are important. Openly answer all of their questions and be friendly. After all, you are asking these people to take time out of their day to talk to you and add to your project.

Planning for Interviews



Planning ahead of time for your interviews will ensure that you are prepared and professional when you meet with your interviewees. When you ask people to be involved in your project, remember they have a lot of things going on in their life so you need to be flexible with when they can meet. I contacted one interviewee in early October who could not meet with me until late November, and that was fine because I realized they were doing me a favor and I needed to be flexible. Have a few dates in mind about a week or two after the date you are calling, in case they ask when you were thinking of meeting, but be willing to meet when they are able. Interviews typically take place in the interviewees' home, but some people may not be comfortable with that or prefer to hold the interview elsewhere, and that is fine. You just need a quiet place with few interruptions for your interview. A coffee shop is generally not a good place to meet, but libraries or community centers usually have meeting rooms that are quiet and offer privacy for the interview. Many of my interviewees opted to meet me in their office at work. Be sure you have the interviewee's contact information when you schedule a date for an interview. Speaking from experience, you do not want to be driving around gravel roads, totally lost, in rural Iowa for 45 minutes because google maps couldn't find the address and you do not have the interviewee's phone number.

You will have to write out some of the questions you plan to ask in your interview for the Standard Application for Human Participants Review, but depending on the person, the questions may need to be modified. For example, in the application for Community Voices the question was 'what is it like working in Postville?' In the actual interview I would change the question according to their job, such as 'what has it like to be a teacher/pastor/librarian in Postville for the last 8/10/20 years?' If you choose to use a biographical data sheet with your project, these will help you form the targeted questions. Even if you wait for the interview to have the interviewee fill out the biographical data sheet, you should come up with a list of questions to ask. This list should have more questions that you think you will need just in case your interviewee is not very verbose. I typically listed 10 questions that I really wanted to ask my interviewees and then between 5 and 10 more questions that I could ask if I felt like I needed more information. Of

course, some questions will be spurred and naturally build off what the interviewee says during the interview.

Long before your interview you should compile all the materials you need. Make sure your computer, phone, recorder, or whatever device you are using to record the interview is charged and is working correctly. I downloaded a free app on my computer and smart phone called Extra Voice Recorder. It has worked very well for me, except on one occasion. I was saying thank you at the completion of a wonderful interview, and when I pushed the stop button on the recorder, the time of my interview went from 1:22:00 to 0:00. It was completely gone. Luckily, the lady I was interviewing is one of the nicest and most understanding people I know and agreed to do the whole interview over in two weeks' time. I have been recording on two devices after that debacle. It would also be helpful to keep the chargers for the devices you are using on hand during all interviews in case something should happen.

Make sure all of your paperwork is printed and looks professional. I kept a folder specifically for holding information for my interviews. You will want to bring a notebook and pen and pencil to take notes and for your interviewee to fill out the forms. If you have to travel for your interviews make sure your car has enough gas and is ready to go. The last thing you need is an empty tank or flat tire to ruin an interview. Get enough sleep the night before because talking with someone for an hour to two takes a lot of energy. It would be very awkward if you were constantly yawning and it may make the interviewee feel like you are bored or not interested in what they have to say, which is of course the exact opposite perception that you want to display. If your interview is scheduled near the lunch or supper hour, be sure to eat beforehand. You and the interviewee can have something to drink, like water, during the interview, but eating would be noisy on the recording and distracting from the task at hand. Make sure you give yourself plenty of time to arrive and prepare for the interview.

The most important part, and a theme that you will notice throughout this guide, is to be flexible. If an interviewee wants to move the meeting time back or change meeting place, you need to be flexible with their schedule. One interviewee that I was scheduled to meet with made an emergency, last minute trip out of town and when I made it to Postville, my grandparents informed me that he had left the night before. The only thing I could do was send an email and reschedule. Keep in mind that there are many things you cannot plan for and during the interviews you will need to think on your toes.

Meeting Interviewees and Etiquette during Interviews



How to act while meeting interviewees may seem like common sense, but for some this stage of the project will be very difficult. Obviously you should dress nicely, especially depending on your project and who are interviewing. If you are going to see a public official in the capital building you should dress up much more than if you are visiting someone in their home. If you show up in a business suit to an interview and the interviewee is in jeans and a t-shirt, it may make them feel uncomfortable. On the other hand, you should not wear jeans and a t-shirt because it may make you seem unprofessional or give the interviewee the impression that you thought the meeting was unimportant. I would recommend a casual-dressy look. I typically wear a nice blouse, with nice simple jeans (no holes, distress marks, or wild rhinestone embellishments), and nice shoes. Wear something you are comfortable in so you do not have to be adjusting or moving around while interviewing. Also, wear socks, especially if the meeting is at the interviewee's home because in many houses it is courteous to take off your shoes.

Besides your dress, your behavior is also very important. When you meet someone it is customary to shake their hand. There are times when handshaking is not advisable for religious or health purposes. Use your best judgment and always err of the side of the least offensive act. It may be best to greet your interviewee with a warm smile and hearty 'nice to meet you' rather than a traditional handshake. When you are sitting down be sure to give your interviewee space. Everyone has their own preference for personal space, just be sure that your interviewee and yourself are comfortable, that you can hear each other, that the recording devices can pick up all the conversation, and that you have space for your notebook and various forms. When I meet people for the first time I am always a little anxious, but I know they may be nervous to share their thoughts with me and apprehensive about having themselves recorded. Try to remain calm even if you have to fake it. Try to keep your hands still while interviewing and maintain an appropriate level of eye contact. If you look nervous and are fiddling with your pen or a piece of paper the whole time, your interviewee may find it hard to be comfortable. Be sure to acknowledge what your interviewee is saying every once in a while by nodding your head or taking notes. Remember, what the interviewee says during the interview is their experience and their opinion. You do not have to agree with it, and do not argue with them about it. If you have

a question about something they said, you can jot that down in your notebook and ask another question to clarify what they said. If there is a discrepancy with a date or place, you can verify the facts later and ask them about it. Little things can be edited in the transcripts.

Interviews are typically between 60 and 120 minutes, but they may be shorter. If they are nearing 120 minutes the interviewee and the interviewer may be very tired and need a break. Sometimes interviews are very short 35 to 45 minutes even after asking 15 questions, and that is okay. That is another part of being flexible. If your interviewee has nothing more to say and you cannot think of any more questions to ask, then it is fine to have a shorter interview. Before each of my interviews, I have told the interviewees that I will be using my computer and phone as recording devices and that I will be periodically checking them to make sure they are still recording. It is better to be straight forward about the technology that you are using than to have the interviewee think you are checking facebook or something while they are talking!

When the interview is over, be sure to remind them of your plan to make the interviews public or how you plan to use them. If you plan to transcribe the interviews, you will need them to read it over at least once (more information about transcribing on the next page). Be sure to explain that and give them an expected timeline. Thank them for meeting with you and make sure you have all of their contact information if they are willing to give it to you: email address, phone number, and mailing address.

After the Interview



Take a deep breathe, you did it! You may be very tired after an interview so relax a bit. Go over your notes to keep the information fresh in your mind. I always upload the audio file of the interview to google drive as soon as I can. That way if anything happened to my computer, the file would be available. You should write a thank you card and send it to the interviewee through the mail. This is a nice thing to do since that person just spent their afternoon helping you with your project, and they will appreciate the gesture. I always include a reminder that I will be contacting them shortly (or in a few months/next semester- whatever works for your time schedule) with the transcript in my thank you notes.

Transcripts



Some projects have a transcribing component, others will just focus on the collection of interviews. While the collection of interviews is very important, transcribing the interviews is too. Many people wishing to use the interviews for research or some sort of project will not listen to the hours of interview, but they will read transcripts. Transcribing takes a long time and involves a lot of stopping and going. According to many oral history guides, it generally takes 10 hours to transcribe one hour of audio. The first transcript of the interview should be exactly what it says in the audio (unless your guide specifies that false starts such as ‘~~They said that, oh no,~~ RaeAnn said that,’ can be edited out). You should listen through it a second time to catch any errors you may have made. Then it is time to give the transcript to the interviewee to see if they want to add, change, or edit the transcript. Next you should make all the changes and compare the transcript with the audio one last time for any final errors. There are a number of stylistic ways to transcribe an interview. Many institutions have their own standards for transcribing, so I would inquire with your professor or supervisor before beginning the transcription. The Community Voices project used a set of procedures developed for Fortepan Iowa, another oral history project that is an ongoing collaboration between the History and Communication Departments at UNI. That form is attached to this document in the appendix.

What can be done with Oral History?



Oral histories can be made into online archives that are accessible to researchers and the general public. They can also be used in books, articles, documentaries, in museum exhibitions, and for any number of other mediums, creative or academic. There are many examples of sources that use oral history on the next page. The best thing about oral history is that it documents things that otherwise might not have been written down. People do not always have a chance to share their experiences and then that information is lost forever.

Oral History Sources



Books that use Oral History

- ✿ Gibbs, Virginia and Luz Mariá Hernández. *Shattered Dreams: The Story of a Historic ICE Raid in the Words of the Detainees*. (Moorepark, CA: Floricanto Press, 2014).
- ✿ Palevsky, Mary. *Atomic Fragments: A Daughter's Questions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
- ✿ Pelka, Fred. *What Have We Done: An Oral History of the Disability Rights Movement* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

Articles that use Oral History

- ✿ Guy, Roger. "Of Voices Few and Far Between: White Appalachian Women Migrants in Postwar Chicago, 1950-70." *Oral History Review*, 37 (2010): 54-70.
- ✿ Holmes, Andrew and Margaret Pilkington. "Storytelling, Floods, Wildflowers, and Washlands: Oral History in the River Ouse Project." *Oral History*, 39 (Autumn 2011): 84-94.
- ✿ K'Meyer, Tracy. "Remembering the Past and Contesting the Future of School Desegregation in Louisville, Kentucky, 1975-2012." *Oral History Review*, 39 (2012): 230-257.

Online Oral History Archives

- ✿ Civil Rights History Project, <http://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/about-this-collection/>.
- ✿ Ellis Island Oral History Project, <http://www.nps.gov/elis/historyculture/oral-histories.htm>.
- ✿ Nevada Test Site Oral History Project, <http://digital.library.unlv.edu/ntsohp/>.

Books on how to do Oral History

- ✿ Neuenschwander, John A. *A Guide to Oral History and the Law* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).
- ✿ Ritchie, Donald A. *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
- ✿ Thompson, Paul. *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Websites on how to do Oral History

- ✿ "Principles and Best Practices." Oral History Association, <http://www.oralhistory.org/about/principles-and-practices/>.
- ✿ "Tips for Interviewers." Regional Oral History Office, <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/resources/rohotips.html>.
- ✿ "Oral History Interviews." The American Folklife Center, <http://www.loc.gov/folklife/familyfolklife/oralhistory.html>.
- ✿ "Oral History." The Writing Center, University of North Carolina, <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/oral-history/>.

Conclusion: Good Luck



You are now armed with the tools and resources to begin your oral history project. What I hope you learned in this guide is that doing oral history is fun! Even people that are shy can overcome their anxieties when they realize that without the recording they are making, the knowledge that the interviewee holds may be lost forever. Remember to be flexible and friendly. Always communicate fully with your interviewees and your professor(s) and supervisor(s). Best of luck to you on your project!



Appendix: Forms and Other Useful Paperwork



- ✿ Community Voices Informed Consent
- ✿ Community Voices Biographical Data Sheet
- ✿ List of Potential Questions
- ✿ Script for Contacting Interviewees
- ✿ Fortepan Transcription Guidelines

Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project

ORAL HISTORY INFORMED CONSENT

The Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project at the University of Northern Iowa seeks to explore the remembered past of those who experienced the “Postville story,” the social context leading up to, including, and following the ICE immigration raid that occurred on May 8th, 2008. You are being invited to collaborate on this project, to help preserve crucial knowledge of what it was/is like to experience the “Postville story.” We want to interview you and record your unique memories.

An audio recording (or series of audio recordings) will be made of your remembrances. Most oral history interviews last between 60 to 120 minutes. The benefits of this project include being able to tell your story and adding valuable information to the historical record concerning the “Postville story.” There are no known risks to participating in this project. You may decide not to discuss confidential information. Your interviewer will honor your decisions regarding anything you choose not to discuss. Once interviewing begins, you may halt at any time for any reason. The interview will resume only when you desire. If, at any time, for any reason, you decide that you do not wish to continue with the project, you can end your participation.

The Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project may transcribe selections of your interview(s). You will be identified by name on your recordings and transcriptions, and they will be made available to the public through The Postville Project (www.postvilleproject.org), The University of Northern Iowa, and Luther College (and its successors and affiliates). This license allows use of your oral history in any way, without restriction, by the public to further and support activities such as (but not limited to) education, teaching, scholarship, and research. This includes the distribution, reproduction, and adaptation of the digital collection, in any (but not confined to) present and future forms of print, electronic and digital media. In short, your interview will be made free and easily accessible to the public via the Postville Project website (www.postvilleproject.org).

If your interview selection(s) is transcribed, you will be given a copy to review. You will be able to make corrections of fact if you so desire. You will also receive a copy of the transcript selection(s) and the full audio interview when completed.

You have been asked to assign copyright to The Postville Project. The purpose of this assignment is not to restrict, but to broaden access. You will retain the personal right to use the information contained in the interview(s). A copy of this form will be provided to you for your records.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in the Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project, please contact the Institutional Review Board administrator at the University of Northern Iowa at 319-273-6148 or Anita.Gordon@uni.edu.

Signature of Participant

Date

Interviewee Name (Print)

If you have any questions, please contact:

Thomas Kessler

The project's mailing address is:

The Postville Project

C/O Thomas Kessler, Rod Library,

University of Northern Iowa

Cedar Falls, IA 50613

Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project

Biographical Data Sheet

Full Name: _____
(First) (Middle) (Last) (Maiden/Other)

Date of Birth: _____ Place of Birth: _____

Spouse: _____ Date of Marriage: _____

Children's Names: _____

Occupation (If retired, from what position): _____

Education: _____

Military Service: _____

Work History: _____

Volunteer Activities/ Positions: _____

Other Information of Interest: _____

Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project

Potential Question List

These are some basic questions that may serve to begin the dialog between interviewer and interviewee. The interviewer may come up with more questions during an interview due to new information that the interviewee may share. Not all questions will be asked to everyone. The interviewer will tailor questions to suit interviewee's occupation, age, involvement, ect.

General questions:

- What is it like to live in Postville?
- How to feel about the media's portrayal of the Postville community and residents?
- Do you have much background knowledge about Latin America?
- How have you seen Postville change over the last 25 years?
- How do you think the community has dealt with diversity in Postville?
- What do you remember about the time surrounding the ICE raid on Agriprocessors?

Questions that only pertain to certain people:

(Questions that might be directed at a teacher)

- What has it been like to be a teacher at Postville elementary for the last _____ years?
- How have teachers in the school district handled the diversity in the school system?
- Has the community embraced the diversity in the schools?
- Has the amount of diversity in the Postville School caused any issues?
- Has the amount of diversity in Postville had any positive impacts on students/teachers/or community members?

(Questions that might be directed at the mayor)

- What is it like being mayor of Postville?
- How have you handled the diversity of your constituents?
- How do you think being the mayor of Postville is similar or different than other towns in rural Iowa?

(Questions targeted at a person who was a high school student during the raid)

- What was it like growing up in Postville?
- Do you remember a time where there wasn't as much diversity in Postville?
- How did people in your age group make differences work?
- What was it like in the high school when the news that the ICE raid was happening reached you?
- How do you think living in Postville has affected you?

(Questions targeted at an active community member)

- What was it like to witness the changes in Postville over the last 25 years?
- What committees have you been involved in over the years in Postville?
- Describe some events that have taken place in Postville that you have either been involved in or experienced?
- What are your hopes for the future of Postville?

Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project

Contact Script for Phone Call, Email, or Letter

Dear _____,

I was given your name as a possible participant in a project I am working on for the UNI Public History Master's Program and The Postville Project website (www.postvilleproject.org). The project is titled Community Voices: Postville Oral History Project and seeks to add the voices, experiences, and opinions of Postville residents to the historical record concerning the "Postville story." I grew up coming to Postville periodically visiting my grandparents, Harold and Dona Peck, and through them I have learned about and experienced some of what makes Postville unique. As a student of History and Anthropology at UNI I became interested in the "Postville story" in an academic sense. While researching Postville, I was able to find plenty of outsider opinions about Postville and the town's diversity through newspaper articles and documentaries, but I thought the voices of actual residents who lived through the changes that have been occurring over the last 25 years were lacking. The goal of this project is to gather oral histories and make them available via The Postville Project website (www.postvilleproject.org). This website and eventually the oral histories of this project can be used by teachers, academics, and others who are interested in Postville, Iowa history, or diversity in rural settings. After we set up a time and place to meet, the process for this project is quite simple and begins with the signing of an informed consent document. Second, I will ask you to fill out a standard biographical data sheet, any questions on this sheet are optional. The project is completely voluntary, so any questions I ask you can be skipped or revised to meet your needs. Interviews tend to last between one and one and a half hours, but can be shorter or longer depending on your needs. If you would be willing to share your experiences of living and working in Postville with me, I would love to hear and share your story. I hope to hear from you soon, feel free to contact me via phone, email, or by mail. If a couple weeks go by, I will contact you to see if you are interested in participating in this project.

Thank you for your time,

RaeAnn Swanson

swansraa@uni.edu

(Phone Number)

(Address)

**FORTEPAN IOWA PROJECT
TRANSCRIPTION TEXT FORMATTING PROCEDURES**

1. *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th edition, will be used.
2. **Calibri, 12 pt. font** will be used for all text, with the exception of number 8 below.
3. **Margins** will be set at 1" all the way around.
4. All text will be **double-spaced**.
5. Insert **page numbers**, beginning with first page, at the top of the page (header), on the right.
6. File Naming Format: Interviewee Last Name_First Initial_Date (example: Reilley_B_05102004)
7. Insert the **filename** (example: Reilley_B_05102004) in the **footer** of the transcript
8. **Brief introductory statement** (name of project, name of interviewee and interviewer, date, place of interview) will be transcribed. Transcript will continue beginning with the first question leading into the narrative.
9. **Questions** will be typed in italics, **answers** in standard type.
10. **Indirect discourse and memories**, as when people are telling stories and are saying, He said, She said, I thought, I remember, etc. will be placed in **Courier New, 10 pt. font** within the transcript to distinguish it as indirect discourse. **Quotation marks will not** be used unless there is an **actual quote** being read or recited. **Actual quotes** will be placed within **quotation marks**, in **Calibri, 12 pt. font**. Examples:
 - He said, I don't agree with weapons testing. And she said, Well, you're entitled to your opinion.
 - I thought, That would be a good thing to do.
 - Dr. Carr Childers (reading from the back of a photograph), "Great to see you Joe. Looks like there is a lot we have to catch up on."
11. If something within the text is **unclear or inaudible**, place both a time signature in brackets and the word "inaudible," also in brackets. If possible, make an attempt to ascertain what it might be. Example:
 - **[00:15:34]** [inaudible]
 - **[01:20:15]** [inaudible—sounds like missile]
12. If you do not know the **spelling** of a word or a name, attempt a spelling and place [sp?] after the word or name.
 - Mikel [sp?]
 - Newenswander [sp?]
13. When referring to decades or years, transcribe as follows:
 - Decades: Spell out as a word. Example: Sixties
 - Decades by century: Write out as full year, followed by "s" (no apostrophe). Example: 1880s
 - Specific years: Type as full year. Example: 1962
 - Specific years within decades as shortened by the interviewee: Indicate in shortened form. Example: '62
14. Any **explanations and/or abbreviations** should be placed in brackets within the text. **No footnotes**. Example:
 - FFA [Future Farmers of America]
 - ORV [Off Road Vehicle]

This is done only **once**, at the first appearance of the term requiring explanation. Thereafter, the acronym, short name, etc. alone is used.



“A recorded oral history is more than just a quote on a page in a book. It is a meaningful story expressed by the person who owns that story.”

~ Dr. Doug Boyd



“Oral history is unique in that it creates its own documents, documents that are by definition explicit dialogues about the past, with the “subject” necessarily triangulated between past experience and the present context of remembering.”

~ Dr. Michael B. Frisch



“Because oral history is a way of involving people heretofore uninvolved in the creation of the documents of their past, it is an opportunity to democratize the nature of history not simply by interviewing them but by seeing that involvement as a prelude to a method which allows people to formulate their own meanings of their past experiences in a structured manner in response to informed criticism.”

~ Ronald J. Grele

