

NORWEGIAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Oral History Guidelines

Capturing a Living History

A guide to the
Norwegian-American
Historical Association
Oral History Project for Post-World
War II Immigration



With the support of:



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www.sonsofnorway.com

Why is the Norwegian-American Historical Association interested in the post-World War II Norwegian immigration?

Much has been researched and written about the Norwegian migration to the United States and Canada between 1825 and the first decades of the 20th century. The Great Depression and World War II caused Norwegian immigration to North America to come to a virtual standstill. While the subsequent number of immigrants has never reached anything close to those of the previous era, Norwegians continue to migrate to North America at a steady rate. The motivation behind those immigrations has not been studied systematically. Collecting the stories of these recent immigrants through a carefully constructed oral interview process will serve as original source material for scholars and family historians interested in this immigrant population.

On whom should the oral histories focus?

Our primary focus for this project is the first-person accounts of Norwegian nationals who have permanently immigrated to the United States or Canada since 1945. We are interested in collecting stories from men and women in all walks of life, at any stage of life.

Who should conduct the oral history interview?

Oral interviews can be conducted by family, friends and fellow members of organizations where post-World War II immigrants are members, such as fraternal societies, churches, lag societies and Norwegian cultural organizations. In most cases, the interviewer should be personally known to the interview subject; knowledgeable about the oral interview process, or willing to learn about oral interview techniques and best practices; and familiar with the technology required to record the interview.

How should oral histories be submitted to the Norwegian-American Historical Association?

We prefer the oral histories to be submitted on a compact disk using a .wav, .mp3 or .mp4 format; however cassette tapes and other digital formats will be accepted. You should also include a completed Oral History Submission Form with each compact disk or tape to aid in indexing. In addition, an Oral History Release Form, completed and signed by the interviewer and the interviewee, will need to be submitted for each oral history subject. You'll find the forms in the appendix at the back of this guide.

How will the oral histories be used?

The Norwegian-American Historical Association will make the oral histories available to researchers, scholars, NAHA members, family historians and the subject's family members in accordance with our archive policies. When permissible, the oral histories may be included in presentations, exhibitions, and on the NAHA website.

Who can I contact for more information?

You can send an email to NAHA@stolaf.edu, call them at 507-786-3221, or send a letter to:
NAHA – Oral History Project
1510 St. Olaf Ave.
Northfield, MN 55057

Getting Started

Identify

Think carefully about potential subjects for the oral interview. Interviewees should be in relatively good health, comfortable with conversation, and of course, be of Norwegian birth living in North America.

Qualify

Before arranging the interview, discuss the project with the potential interviewee. Are they comfortable with answering the questions, and in a physical condition that would allow for a conversation of one to two hours?

Inform

Be sure the interviewee knows how the oral interview will be used, who will archive it, and the importance of providing a signed consent form at the conclusion of the interview process. You may want to provide a list of basic questions ahead of time so the interviewee can mentally prepare his or her answers.

Prepare

Read about how to conduct an oral interview. The Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage has a free oral history guide online at http://www.folklife.si.edu/education_exhibits/resources/guide/introduction.aspx.

Select a time and a place that will be quiet, comfortable and without interruptions or excessive background noises. Bring enough recording media (cassette tapes, flash drives, CDs or memory cards depending on how the interview is being recorded). Test your equipment ahead of time; bring plenty of batteries and a note pad and pencil for jotting down follow-up questions, and your list of questions. At the beginning of the interview session record the subject's name, location of the interview, and the interviewer's name.

Interview

During the interview process, allow the conversation to flow naturally. Ask your subject open ended questions that will encourage more than a yes or no answer. Ask clarifying questions if unfamiliar terminology is used. Ask for last names if other individuals are mentioned. Ask the interviewee to spell unusual names. Carefully monitor your subject for signs of fatigue and schedule a second interview if he or she tires before your questions are answered. If permissible, photograph or videotape any physical items related to the interview (photos, awards, artwork, craft items, mementos, keepsakes, etc.).

Consent

Be sure to review and have your subject sign the Oral History Release Form. Document any limitations on the use of the interview material. A sample consent form is located in the Appendix.

Document and Preserve

As soon as possible, download and/or make a spare copy of the interview file and keep it in a safe place. You may want to create an index of the interview topics, including the points on the recording where your topics are discussed. A sample Index form is included in the Appendix. Always keep a backup copy of the recording until you are assured that the material has been received safely at the NAHA archives. Mail materials to:
NAHA Archives
1510 St. Olaf Ave.
Northfield, MN 55057

Sample Questions

Adapted from the Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide, (c. 2003 by the Smithsonian Institution)

This is a selection of sample questions. Feel free to revise as appropriate for your subject, but try to maintain an open-ended format that will encourage elaboration by your subject.

Biographical information

What is your name?

Are there any traditional first names or nicknames in your family? What are they?

How did they come about?

Are there any naming traditions? What are they?

What Norwegian names do your family continue to use in North America?

What is your age now?

How old were you when you came to North America?

Where were you born?

Where did you grow up?

Describe the house, farm, town and/or region where you grew up.

Where do you live now?

How did you come to live in this place? What other places have you lived?

What led you to reside in those places?

How big is your family?

How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Did your parents or any of your siblings immigrate to North America?

Where do they live now?

Tell me about your spouse. How did you meet?

Do you have any courtship stories?

What is his/her family like?

How many children do you have?

Where do they live, if not with you?

How did your parents, grandparents or other relatives come to meet and marry?

What stories have come down to you about your parents and grandparents?

What stories have you passed on to your family?

Education

Describe the schools you attended.
 What subjects did you like the best, the least?
 What is your earliest memory of school?

Did you attend college and/or graduate school?
 If so, where and what subjects did you take?

What languages do you speak?
 Do you speak different languages in different settings
 such as at home, at school or work?
 What language was spoken in your home after you
 immigrated to North America?
 If you spoke English, were there any occasions or
 situations when Norwegian was used, or vice versa?
 Can you give some examples?

Growing up

What are some of your childhood memories?
 What games did you play as a child?
 Did you sing verses when you played games?
 What were they?
 What kinds of toys did you play with? Who made them?
 Did you or your parents make any yourself? How did
 you make them?
 What kind of home entertainment was there?
 Was there storytelling? Music?
 Were there craft traditions? Describe those traditions.
 Which of these have you carried on in North
 America?
 Did you teach any of these to your children or
 grandchildren?

Military Service

Did you serve in the military? If so, what branch of the
 military?
 Where were you stationed?
 What military training did you receive?
 What was your military specialty?
 Did you ever serve during a military conflict? Describe
 that experience.

Career

Describe your career.
 What companies or institutions have you worked for?
 What was your title or position?
 What do you think were your greatest career
 accomplishments?

Who were some of the individuals who were influential
 in your career?

In what ways did your Norwegian background impact
 your career choices and experiences?

Sports and Hobbies

What sports did you participate in while in Norway?
 What sports did you or do you participate in while in
 North America?
 Did you belong to any sporting clubs or school teams?
 How did you learn your sport?
 If you learned a sport in Norway, how did it differ from
 what you experienced in North America?
 What hobbies did you engage in while in Norway?
 Did you continue to participate in North America?
 Did you acquire new hobbies after moving to North
 America?
 Describe how you learned your hobby and from whom?
 What do you value most about this hobby or skill.

The Immigration Experience

Describe your thought process behind your decision to
 immigrate to North America
 Had you been to North America prior to deciding to
 immigrate?
 Who or what influenced your decision?
 Who did you know in North America?
 What concerns about moving to North America did you
 have? How did your family members feel about your
 decision? What were your major considerations in
 deciding to immigrate?

Describe your first visit to North America.

What was your journey like?

What were your first impressions and early experiences
 in this country?

What impressed you?

What concerned you?

When you first moved to North America, what
 possessions did you bring with you?

Who, if anyone, accompanied you?

What were the biggest adjustments you had to make?

What were your favorite foods that you couldn't get
 in North America, and what foods did you miss the
 most?

What connections did you maintain with Norway? How
 frequently did you travel back to Norway?

Holidays and Celebrations

How have your holiday traditions changed since moving to North America?

What traditions have you retained since moving to North America?

What new traditions have you adopted?

How do you celebrate traditional Norwegian holidays in North America?

Who is included in the celebrations?

What Norwegian or Norwegian-American cultural organizations have you belonged to or joined?

How have you connected with other Norwegians living in North America?

What traditions or customs have you made an effort to preserve? Why?

Are there traditions you have given up or changed? Why?

What food traditions does your family have?

Were recipes preserved and handed down in your family from generation to generation?

What are their origins and how have they changed over the years?

Have any of the ingredients been adapted or changed?

Are there certain foods that are traditionally prepared for holidays and celebrations?

Who makes them?

Are there family stories connected to the preparation of special foods?

Community Life and Civic Engagement

Where have you lived in North America?

Describe why you chose these places to live.

Describe your local community.

What are your neighbors like?

How does your community in North America compare to where you lived in Norway?

What stories and memories come to mind when thinking about the area in Norway from where you came?

How has your community in Norway changed since you left?

What community traditions are celebrated today where you live? Church suppers? Syttende Mai celebrations? Midsummer's Eve celebrations?

What are they like?

How long have they been going on?

How have they changed?

Who is involved?

Why are they important to the community?

How have historical events affected your family and community? For example, what were your family's experiences during World War II?

What other world or national events affected your family after coming to North America?

Describe any volunteer positions you have held.

Have you served on any non-profit or civic boards?

What organization(s) did you serve, and what position(s) did you hold?

Have you ever run for public office and if so, at what level?

Other Important Information

Is there anything else not already covered that you would like to share?

Create your own questions

Use the next page to note additional questions for your interview.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

(6) _____

(7) _____

(8) _____

ORAL HISTORY RELEASE FORM

Please include a signed copy with Oral History materials

Post World War II Norwegian-American Immigration Oral History Project

Date: _____ Interviewer: _____

Tape identifier: _____

Name of Person(s) Interviewed: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Number: _____ Email Address: _____

Date of Birth: Day _____/Month_____/Year_____

By signing the form below, you give your permission for any tapes, videos or photographs made during this project to be used by researchers and the public for educational purposes including print, digital or web-based publication, exhibitions and presentations. All materials will be preserved in the archives of the Norwegian-American Historical Association, located in Northfield, Minnesota and public access will be determined by their policies and procedures. By giving your permission, you do not give up any copyright or performance rights that you may hold.

I agree to the uses of these materials described above, except for any restrictions, noted below.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Researcher's Name (please print): _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

Restriction description: _____

By checking the box, you grant your permission for any tapes, videos or photographs made during this project to be used by Sons of Norway for communications and public relations purposes.

PHOTOGRAPH LOG

Name of Donor/Interviewer: _____

Name of Interviewee: _____

Photographs can be submitted in digital or print format. For digital photographs, use the file name as the photo number. For print photographs, lightly number the back of the photograph with a soft pencil and include the photo number on the log below. If the photo cannot be marked, slip it into an envelope and number the envelope.

Photo Number Date (dd/mm/yyyy) Place taken

Description _____

Photo Number Date (dd/mm/yyyy) Place taken

Description _____

Photo Number Date (dd/mm/yyyy) Place taken

Description _____

To list additional photos, photocopy this form or go to www.naha.stolaf.edu/oral_history to print additional forms.



At NAHA, we understand the value of collecting, preserving and telling stories that are central to the Norwegian-American experience. Since 1925 we have done just that. And for more than 85 years we have contributed to the immigrant experience by sharing the stories of individuals, families, businesses, churches and schools. These stories, which are shared through scholarly endeavors and archival anecdotes alike, are essential to bridging the past and the future. The NAHA mission is central to keeping Norwegian-American stories alive and vibrant.

From matters of the heart to matters of state, the history of a people reveals its culture through the infinitely significant web of daily life...at home, at work and in their communities. NAHA knows the importance of preserving stories - the who, what, when, where, how and why of the immigrant experience.

Stories, more than anything, help us to remember, understand and honor the past - *and* prepare for the future.

For additional information on the Norwegian-American Historical Association, contact:

Norwegian-American Historical Association
1510 St. Olaf Ave.
Northfield, MN 55057

Email: naha@stolaf.edu
Phone: (507) 786-3221
Website: www.naha.stolaf.edu/archives/oralhistory



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Oral History & Sons of Norway

Sons of Norway is proud to support this project and strongly encourages its members to participate. Sons of Norway members who conduct an immigrant interview can count their work towards a Cultural Skills pin. An oral history interview can be used as an elective activity in the units on literature, genealogy and more. To learn more about Cultural Skills and how to use your oral history interview to earn a pin, email culturalskills@sofn.com or call 1(800) 945-8851. Not yet a member? Join instantly online at www.sonsofnorway.com.

About Sons of Norway's Cultural Skills Program

Sons of Norway's Cultural Skills Program provides a framework for learning about traditional and contemporary Norwegian culture. Each unit consists of three levels of skill-specific activities to guide you as you learn. You can complete the units on your own, through your lodge or through a special class or group. For each level, you'll complete a few activities, email (or mail) them in to Sons of Norway Headquarters, get feedback, and earn a pin in recognition of your accomplishments. As a benefit of membership, the Cultural Skills Program is available only to members of Sons of Norway. For more information about Sons of Norway or the Cultural Skills Program, check out www.sonsofnorway.com.

For additional information on the Sons of Norway and the Cultural Skills Program, contact:

Sons of Norway
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Minneapolis, MN 55408-2666

Email: culturalskills@sofn.com
Phone: 1(800)945-8851
Website: www.sonsofnorway.com