

RECORDED ORAL HISTORIES OF THE EASTERN TOWNSHIPS RESEARCH CENTRE: A NEW RESEARCH TOOL

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The Eastern Townships Research Centre (ETRC) has in its fonds and collections, nearly 250 historical interviews on 193 audiotape cassettes. Some date as far as 1977 and only a small fraction are transcribed. To improve subject access to the interviews, a new research tool has been developed. This article presents the results of a project coordinated and overseen by Meredith Watkins¹, in collaboration with the ETRC Archivist, in the summer of 2003. Figure 1 is a list of the ETRC fonds or collections that contain oral history interviews.

The Context

It is the mandate of the ETRC's Archives Department to acquire, process, disseminate, and conserve the archival heritage of Quebec's Eastern Townships English-speaking community for the purpose of research and teaching. The scope of the ETRC Archives department's mandate reads: *The Archives Department acquires private archives whatever their nature or their format are, such as architectural, cartographic, graphic and computer documents, moving images and sound recordings, manuscripts, multi-media ensembles, and microforms.* As a result, the archives department has acquired several oral history interviews, which are currently on audiotape cassettes. In the interest of making these interviews more accessible to researchers, and since the ETRC does not have the resources required to transcribe all 250 historical interviews, a content summary research tool was developed that will enable easier subject access to the information on these cassettes. This content summary acts as a "table of contents" to the interviews, and facilitates the work of researchers.

Code	Title of fonds or collection	# of interviews associated with this fonds or collection	# of audio tape cassettes
P059	Tom Martin fonds	87 interviews	60 Tapes
P020	Eastern Townships Heritage Foundation fonds	74 interviews	62 Tapes
P995	Eastern Townships Research Centre Special Media Collection	55 interviews	42 tapes
P045	Celtic Research Group fonds	8 interviews	7 tapes
P038	Townshippers' Association fonds	11 interviews	8 tapes
P023	Sherbrooke and District University Women's Club fonds	9 interviews	9 tapes
P062	Kay Kinsman fonds	3 interviews	2 tapes
P047	Joyce Marshall fonds	2 interviews	1 tape
UC023	United Church of Canada Quebec/Sherbrooke Presbytery fonds	2 interviews	2 tapes

Figure 1

Methodology

Phase 1: Establishing fields

The first step of the project was to identify key information from the interviews. A standard "form" was developed and filled out for each interview. Nine fields were chosen.

- 1 *Interviewee*: Identification of the interviewee (Name, age, etc.).
Provide as much information as is given on cassette
- 2 *Interviewer*: Identification of the interviewer (Name, age, etc.).
Provide as much information as is given on cassette
- 3 *Date of interview*
- 4 *Length of interview*
- 5 *Location of the interview*
- 6 *Place of residence of interviewee*

7 *Quality of recording*: Many of the audio tapes are over 20 years old. Therefore, it was important to survey the quality of the recording so that pro-active measures are taken to transfer the information of poor quality tapes.

8 *Content*: The most important field of the project. Please see phase 2 for a synopsis.

The *ninth field* (not numbered) is the interview identification field that identifies the interview itself as a physical entity. This includes information on which funds the interview belongs to, the call number for the tape, and the box number identifying the location of the cassette in our compact storage. Please see figure 2 for samples.

Phase 2: Listening to the tapes

The second phase consisted of filling out the form established in phase 1. The research assistant listened to each interview using a standard cassette player equipped with a minute counter. It was therefore possible to set up a sequential list of the topics discussed and to subdivide the interview into subject themes (see figure 2, field #8, for an example). When filling out the form, the tape was stopped and the time on the counter recorded for each new question, or new subject. The research assistant had to be vigilant in assessing the flow of the interview and be able to identify new topics of discussion. It is important to note that the content portion of the form (field #8) is based on the interpretation of the research assistant.

Phase 3: Entering the data into a database

After the research assistant listened to the tapes and created a form for each interview, she entered the data into a database. This database enables researchers to use the database's "find" function.

Identification: P020, tape 77-5, box E-8.

- 1 **Interviewee:** Mrs. Newton Stephenson, Born August 18, 1900, in Liverpool England
- 2 **Interviewer:** Gordie (?)².
- 3 **Date of interview:** June 16, 1977.
- 4 **Length of interview:** 1 hour, 9 minutes.
- 5 **Location of interview:** Grace Christian Home
- 6 **Place of Residence:** Previously resided in Bulwer.
- 7 **Quality of recording:** Good
- 8 **Content**³:

Time elapsed	Content
Side 1	
0-1:03	Settlement of Canada – personal perspective
1:03-1:36	Husband as farmer. Farm life: 110 acre farm
1:36-2:10	Sugar bushing (300 tapped trees), sugar camp
2:10-	Process of making maple syrup
Side 2	
0-6:50	Process of making maple syrup (cont'd)
6:50-8:05	Horses used on the farm (Clydesdales)
8:05-9:00	Farm life: Cattle, pigpen, barn
9:00-9:52	Materials fabricated to be used around the house: Fat (for soap), etc.
9:52-12:15	Family's source of funds. Driving to market, selling livestock, wood, butter, eggs, etc.
12:15-15:13	Husband: Memories of his working on the roads for tax breaks, maintaining roads
15:13-20:05	Transportation horse and buggy. First car she saw was in 1921 (doctor's car)
20:05-21:00	Train system: Unreliable
21:00-22:08	Shortage of manpower for farm
22:08-24:11	Talked of daily diet: Vegetables, buckwheat, canned dandelion greens, luxury foods: fresh fruit (oranges, pears, peaches)
24:11-30:33	Forested land, peel pulpwood, virgin timber.
30:33-31:35	Small industries, Hannah Banks (cheese maker), saw mills
END	

Figure 2a

Identification: Tom Martin fonds, Eastern Townships during World War II, P059/002, tape #6, box E-6.

- 1 **Interviewee:** Mrs. Daisy Allison, Born October 1, 1914, in Richmond.
- 2 **Interviewer:** Muriel Boynton.
- 3 **Date of interview:** 1979.
- 4 **Length of interview:** 24 minutes.
- 5 **Location of interview:** Danville(?)
- 6 **Place of Residence:** Melbourne.
- 7 **Quality of recording:** Good
- 8 **Content:**

Time elapsed	Content
Side 1	
0-0:06	Lived in Eastern Townships during WWII – Stayed home and looked after her son.
0:06-0:34	Husband volunteered in July 1940.
0:34-2:08	How Mrs. Allison was affected by the war.
2:08-2:50	Memories of learning about the start of the war.
2:50-4:33	Difficult living conditions during the war, was sent an allowance.
4:33-6:07	Rationing of sugar and butter, tea and coffee – stamp system.
6:07-8:44	Social life changed, – women sewed and knitted for the Red Cross – National Unity.
8:44-10:53	Memories of the conscription crisis.
10:53-11:25	Memories of V.E day and V.J. day.
11:25-12:03	Husband fought overseas in Hong Kong was taken prisoner – died in 1942 as a prisoner of War (P.O.W).
12:03-14:52	How the war affected her most.
14:52-16:13	Leisure time during the war. She taught in a small country school (until 1970).
16:13-18:04	Her thoughts on the newspaper coverage of the war.
18:04-18:35	Description of a savings stamp.
18:35-19:31	Description of P.O.W. camp in Hong Kong.
19:31-20:46	Home front volunteering during war.
20:46-22:00	First impressions of WWII from her point of view (a young girl).
Side 2	Empty

Figure 2(b)

Identification: Celtic Research Group fonds, P045, tape #4, box E-7.

- 1 **Interviewee:** Mrs. Elsie Mackenzie
- 2 **Interviewer:** Isabelle Lautide.
- 3 **Date of interview:** October 12, 1983.
- 4 **Length of interview:** 30 minutes.
- 5 **Location of interview:** Grace Christian home (Huntingville, Quebec).
- 6 **Place of Residence:** (?)
- 7 **Quality of recording:** Good
- 8 **Content:**

Time elapsed	Content
Side 1	
0-0:33	Family history (background).
0:34-2:28	Grandfather owned a mill in Marsboro. Gave the mill to her father. Description of work that was done at the mill.
2:28-6:28	Mother's history. Mother's parents came from Scotland.
6:28-10:00	Went to Lake Megantic for supplies.
10:00-11:23	Grandmother made woolen cloth.
11:23-12:30	Grandfather was preacher.
12:30-13:17	Other relatives came to Canada by boat: description of experiences on the boat.
13:17-16:46	Grandfather (John P. Macleod) can sing in Gaelic.
16:46-18:45	Information about her 3 sisters.
18:45-21:25	Happy life in the settlement. Usually did boy's work.
21:25-23:35	Description of life for the first settlers in the area.
23:35-26:12	Description of a Ceilidh (<i>cay-lee</i>) – to gather together or visit (as in a party) for an evening of traditional Scottish/Irish entertainment.
26:12-30:00	Neighbours spoke Gaelic.
Side 2	Side two contains another separate interview from P045.

Figure 2(c)

- 2 Some fields are incomplete since the information is not available.
- 3 The content portion of the form was originally recorded in point form. As a result, some portions of the sample forms have been edited for this article to ease readability.
- 4 Researchers interested in learning more about this research tool are invited to contact the ETRC archivist.

