



PRESERVING THE VOICES OF
HISTORY: A LEWIS COUNTY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

CAPSTONE TEAM AND SPONSOR



TEAM

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JASON MATTSON, EX. DIRECTOR
LEWIS COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM
<https://lewiscountymuseum.org/>

INFORMATION PROBLEM CONTEXT

THE LEWIS COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM (LCHM) ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE WAS ONCE ADDED TO REGULARLY, RESULTING IN THE APPROXIMATELY 500 ORAL HISTORY RECORDINGS CURRENTLY HELD BY THE MUSEUM'S ARCHIVE. HOWEVER, THIS PROGRAM WAS DISCONTINUED BACK IN THE EARLY 1980'S AND NO NEW RECORDINGS WERE ADDED IN THOSE 40 YEARS. THE CURRENT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE MUSEUM, JASON MATTSON, WOULD LIKE TO RESUME COLLECTING AND PRESERVING LOCAL HISTORY AS TOLD BY THE RESIDENTS OF LEWIS COUNTY.

HOWEVER, AS A SMALL, LOCAL MUSEUM, THEY DIDN'T HAVE ENOUGH RESOURCES AND TIME TO ENGAGE IN THE KIND OF OUTREACH NECESSARY TO REACH INTERESTED INDIVIDUALS AND CONDUCT THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS THEMSELVES. THIS IS WHERE OUR TEAM COMES IN! WE AGREED TO CONDUCT ALL THE NECESSARY OUTREACH, SCHEDULING OF INTERVIEWS, AND EDITING NECESSARY TO MAKE THESE RECORDINGS ARCHIVE-READY.

THE OVERALL AIM OF THIS PROJECT WAS TO PROVIDE CURRENT LEWIS COUNTY RESIDENTS WITH THE CHANCE TO SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCES AND STORIES, AND TO PROVIDE FUTURE LEWIS COUNTY RESIDENTS THE CHANCE TO LEARN ABOUT HISTORICALLY INTERESTING INFORMATION FROM PEOPLE WHO REALLY LIVED IT; ALL WHILE SUPPORTING A WELL-LOVED LOCAL MEMORY INSTITUTION.



PROJECT OBJECTIVE

DUE TO THE FAIRLY SHORT CAPSTONE PROJECT TIMELINE, A MODEST GOAL OF 5-10 ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS WAS DECIDED UPON. EACH INTERVIEW WOULD BE SCHEDULED, RECORDED, EDITED, AND SAVED TO A USB THUMB DRIVE TO BE DELIVERED TO EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MATTSON AT THE PROJECT'S CONCLUSION. THE AVERAGE LENGTH OF A COMPLETED ORAL HISTORY WAS APPROXIMATELY 45 MINUTES. IN THE END, 7 ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS WERE PROVIDED TO THE DIRECTOR TO BE ENTERED INTO THE MUSEUM'S ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE. IN ADDITION TO THE INTERVIEWS, THE DIRECTOR WAS ALSO PROVIDED DONATION FORMS FOR EACH INTERVIEWEE, AS WELL AS A LIST OF PEOPLE INTERESTED IN BEING PART OF AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW IN THE FUTURE, SHOULD THE MUSEUM HAVE THE TIME AND RESOURCES TO CONTINUE CONDUCTING THEM.

PROJECT APPROACH

WHEN DECIDING HOW TO GET IN TOUCH WITH LOCAL COMMUNITY MEMBERS ABOUT PARTICIPATING IN AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW, SEVERAL OUTREACH OPTIONS WERE CONSIDERED AND IMPLEMENTED. UTILIZING SOCIAL MEDIA WAS AN EASY FIRST CHOICE. MULTIPLE FACEBOOK POSTS WERE CREATED WITHIN LEWIS COUNTY FOCUSED FACEBOOK GROUPS AND PAGES. A GOOGLE FORM SIGN-UP SHEET WAS CREATED AND ATTACHED TO EACH POST, ALLOWING ANY INTERESTED COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO SHARE THEIR NAMES AND CONTACT INFORMATION. THE TEAM WOULD THEN REACH OUT TO EACH RESPONDENT TO GATHER MORE INFORMATION, SUCH AS THE EVENT OR TOPIC THE ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WOULD BE ABOUT AND THE INTERVIEWEE'S AVAILABLE DAYS AND TIMES. HOWEVER, AFTER A FEW WEEKS, RESPONSES BEGAN TO DROP OFF, EVEN AFTER REPOSTING THE DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT AND THE SIGN-UP LINK IN EACH OF THE GROUPS.

SO, IT BECAME NECESSARY TO ADAPT AND CHANGE OUR STRATEGY. WE WERE LUCKY ENOUGH TO GET IN TOUCH WITH A REPORTER FOR A LOCAL NEWSPAPER, THE CHRONICLE. THE REPORTER SUGGESTED HE CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW WITH THE TEAM ABOUT THE PROJECT, INCLUDING THE LINK TO THE SIGN-UP FORM AND OTHER CONTACT INFORMATION AT THE END OF THE ARTICLE. THIS ALLOWED US TO REACH A MUCH WIDER AUDIENCE AND SECURE A FEW MORE INTERVIEWS. WHILE THERE WAS LITTLE IN THE WAY OF PLANNED IN-PERSON OUTREACH (SUCH AS FLYERS OR POSTERS), SEVERAL INDIVIDUALS WHO AGREED TO BE INTERVIEWED ACTUALLY SPREAD THE WORD TO THEIR FRIENDS AND FAMILY, PRODUCING A FEW MORE INTERESTED POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES.

EVALUATION

THIS PROJECT NOT ONLY RENEWED A PREVIOUSLY DISCONTINUED ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE AFTER 40 YEARS OF SUSPENDED OPERATION, IT RENEWED A COMMUNITY'S INTEREST IN THE MUSEUM ITSELF AND THE WAYS HISTORY IS RECORDED AND REMEMBERED. IT ALLOWED COMMUNITY MEMBERS TO BECOME ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN WHAT STORIES GET TOLD, MAKING SURE THEIR PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES ABOUT WHAT IT IS LIKE TO LIVE IN LEWIS COUNTY WILL BE PRESERVED FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

WHILE THE PROJECTOR OVERALL WAS QUITE SUCCESSFUL, I RECOGNIZE THAT THERE ARE SEVERAL CHANGES I WOULD MAKE IF I WERE TO TAKE PART IN A SIMILAR PROJECT AGAIN. FIRST AND FOREMOST, I WOULD START EARLIER. A LOT OF TIME WAS SPENT PLANNING, CONSIDERING WHERE AND HOW TO START, WHERE THE MOST LIKELY CANDIDATES WOULD BE FOUND, INSTEAD OF SIMPLY BEGINNING TO MAKE CONTACT WITH COMMUNITY MEMBERS. I WOULD ALSO MAKE MORE OF AN EFFORT TO DO IN-PERSON OUTREACH, PASSING OUT FLYERS, ASKING TO HANG POSTERS IN LOCAL BUSINESSES, VISITING LOCAL SENIOR CENTERS, ETC. BECAUSE OF MY BUSY SCHEDULE, I CHOSE TO PURSUE MOSTLY ONLINE OUTREACH AND I THINK FUTURE PROJECTS OF THIS KIND WOULD BENEFIT FROM A MORE WELL-ROUNDED OUTREACH APPROACH.

NEXT STEPS BEYOND CAPSTONE

THE FUTURE OF THE LEWIS COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM'S ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVE IS NOT CERTAIN. AFTER THESE INTERVIEWS ARE ADDED TO THE COLLECTION, IT IS ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT THE MUSEUM WILL STILL NOT BE ABLE TO SPARE THE TIME AND RESOURCES TO CONTINUE CONDUCTING ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS OF THEIR OWN. WHILE IT FEELS AS THOSE MUCH HAS CHANGED IN THE SHORT TIME THAT THIS PROJECT HAS TAKEN TO REACH ITS CONCLUSION, FUNDING AND STAFFING HAVE NOT CHANGED FOR THE LCHM. BUT PERHAPS WITH THE PUBLICITY IN THE LOCAL NEWSPAPER AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS SHARING THEIR EXPERIENCES, WE WILL SEE AN INCREASED INTEREST IN, AND A PUSH FOR FUNDING FOR, THE MUSEUM. OFTENTIMES PEOPLE WHO DON'T REGULARLY INTERACT WITH A SERVICE OR ORGANIZATION CAN FORGET THAT IT IS THERE. HOPEFULLY REMINDING THE LEWIS COUNTY COMMUNITY OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR MUSEUM WILL BRING ENOUGH VISITORS AND REVENUE TO HIRE ADDITIONAL STAFF OR TO INSPIRE OTHER LOCAL STUDENTS TO CONDUCT SIMILAR PROJECTS TO THIS ONE, CONTINUING TO HELP ADD TO THE HISTORICAL RECORD FOR AN AREA WHOSE HISTORY IS AS RICH AND VARIED AS ITS CITIZENS.

THANK YOU!

Thank you for taking the time to read through my project overview! Hopefully it inspires you to make an effort to support local memory institutions and instills in you a sense of the importance of learning our history first hand from the people who truly lived it.

- Isebelle Fraser