



Edited by

Kristina R. Llewellyn, Alexander Freund,
and Nolan Reilly

THE CANADIAN ORAL HISTORY READER

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The Canadian Oral History Reader

*Edited by Kristina R. Llewellyn, Alexander Freund,
and Nolan Reilly*

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Contents

Acknowledgments · ix

Introduction · 3

Alexander Freund, Kristina R. Llewellyn, and Nolan Reilly

SECTION ONE: METHODOLOGY

1 Methodology for Recording Oral Histories in the Aboriginal Community · 25

Brian Calliou

2 Sharing Authority with Baba · 53

Stacey Zembrzycki

3 Oral History and Ethical Practice after *TCP&E* · 73

Nancy Janovicek

4 Legal Issues Regarding Oral Histories · 98

Jill Jarvis-Tonus

SECTION TWO: INTERPRETATION

5 Reflections on the Politics and Praxis of Working-Class

Oral Histories · 19

Joan Sangster

- 6 Productive Tensions: Feminist Readings of Women Teachers' Oral Histories · 141
Kristina R. Llewellyn
- 7 A Canadian Family Talks about Oma's Life in Nazi Germany: Th ee-Generational Interviews and Communicative Memory · 159
Alexander Freund
- 8 Oral History, Narrative Strategies, and Native American Historiography · 180
Julie Cruikshank

SECTION THREE: PRESERVATION AND PRESENTATION

- 9 Hidden from Historians: Preserving Lesbian Oral History in Canada · 201
Elise Chenier
- 10 Oral History as Process-Generated Data · 218
Alexander Freund
- 11 "When I Was Your Age": Bearing Witness in Holocaust Education in Montreal · 239
Stacey Zembrzyski and Steven High
- 12 Listening and Learning with Life Stories of Human Rights Violations · 266
Bronwen Low and Emmanuelle Sonntag

SECTION FOUR: ADVOCACY

- 13 Narrative Wisps of the Ochēkiwi Sipi Past: A Journey in Recovering Collective Memories · 285
Winona Wheeler
- 14 I Can Hear Lois Now: Corrections to My Story of the Internment of Japanese Canadians · 297
Pamela Sugiman

- 15 Contested Memories: Efforts of the Powerful to Silence
Former Inmates' Histories of Life in an Institution for
"Mental Defectives" · 318
Claudia Malacrida

- 16 "Don't Speak for Me": Practising Oral History amid the
Legacies of Conflict · 335
Joy Parr

Postscript · 347
Ronald J. Grele

Additional Readings in Canadian Oral History: 1980–2012 · 361
Kristina R. Llewellyn and Dana Nowak

Contributors · 373

Index · 377

Introduction

*Alexander Freund, Kristina R. Llewellyn,
and Nolan Reilly*

If oral history cannot conclusively establish pre-sovereignty
(after this decision) occupation of land, it may still be relevant to
demonstrate that current occupation has its origins
prior to sovereignty.

Chief Justice Antonio Lamer¹

I call myself a chronicler, a collector of people's tales and stories.
Really what I am is a collector of people.

Barry Broadfoot²

For several decades, scholars in various disciplines have used oral
history methods as a means of both reclaiming the history of the
marginal and silenced and centring women's lives.

Franca Iacovetta³

Those familiar with the field of oral history will realize that the term carries different meanings, according to context, historical period, and the purpose of the researcher. To some people, it denotes knowledge about the past that has been relayed by word of mouth from one generation to the next. To others, it is the practice of recording, archiving, and analyzing eyewitness testimony and life histories. Some use it as a tool for political activism, to disseminate knowledge, or to raise awareness. For many, including the editors of this volume, it is a global social movement for democratizing history; that is, for making the telling and writing of history more inclusive. In this view, oral history is a powerful tool to engage people in the discovery and making of history and in the critical assessment of how stories about the past are created.

The Canadian Oral History Reader seeks to make oral history accessible to a broad public. It is structured as a guide that takes the reader from a general introduction to the method of oral history (Section One) to questions about the interpretation of oral narratives (Section Two), the preservation of oral history interviews (Section Three), and the role of oral history in advocacy work (and vice versa) (Section Four). The *Reader* addresses diverse audiences. It introduces novice researchers to the rich heritage and diversity of Canadian oral history practices. It provides a resource for teachers, community and public historians, and more advanced scholars, building the foundation for a renewed dialogue among Canadian and global oral history movements. Newcomers and experienced practitioners alike will benefit from reading (and re-reading) the following articles, which explore a range of methodological and theoretical aspects of oral history.

As a resource for students, researchers, and activists to learn about Canada-based scholarship, *The Canadian Oral History Reader* provides the tools for joining the international movement to democratize history. In this introduction, we distinguish among different understandings of oral history, review the development of oral history in Canada, position it in its global context, and explain how the individual chapters in this collection advance our knowledge of oral history. After surveying the state of the art of oral history in Canada, we conclude by reflecting on potential future challenges for the field.

Oral history has been practised for a long time, in different cultures and countries, and in many disciplines – from academic historians, sociologists, and ethnographers to archivists, museum curators, and other public historians, to journalists and activists.⁴ Defining oral history is therefore not easy; nor is it necessarily desirable, because any definition will exclude certain practices and practitioners. In the 1970s, for example, the Canadian oral history movement was severely hindered by squabbles among academics, archivists, teachers, journalists, activists, and others about what constituted oral history.⁵ Canadian oral historian, writer, and activist Michael Riordan, who has been interviewing people from around the world since the 1970s, was once told by an academic at an oral history summer institute that what he did was not oral history. He later wrote: “I did wonder at the enormous human capacity for dogma … Even in this endeavour that all of us at the institute were celebrating as one of the most democratic vehicles possible for human expression, here was someone designating what does and what does not count.”⁶ Clearly, definitions can easily be misunderstood or misused in an attempt to exclude.

Nevertheless, definitions can help to clarify communication, raise consciousness, and bring practitioners together. For decades in Canada, even as oral history movements were flourishing around the world, many Canadians creating and using oral sources did not consider their work oral history or themselves as oral historians. As a result, they worked in isolation instead of collaborating, sharing, and meeting. With this background of uncertainty about Canadian oral history identity in mind, we have assembled this *Reader* for oral historians broadly defined; that is, not only historians using oral sources, but rather everyone – from inside and outside of academia – who collects, creates, studies, or preserves oral history or oral tradition or both. Yet, despite such inclusiveness, we must also ask: What brings and holds all these disciplines and practices together?

Here is one inclusive framework for thinking about the methods used in oral history: We can think of it as: a method for creating historical sources (methodology); a method for using and making sense of what we learn from eyewitnesses (interpretation); a method for archiving and presenting memories of our individual and collective past (preservation and presentation); and a method for disseminating knowledge and raising awareness about past and present injustices and inequalities (advocacy). This categorization – methodology, interpretation, preservation and presentation, and advocacy – serves as the outline of this *Reader*. Let us look more closely at these four methods of oral history.

Modern oral historians often point to ancient Chinese and Greek historians as their predecessors, because the ancient scribes relied extensively on eyewitness accounts to write their histories. Others, using oral history to signify the traditions and knowledge orally transmitted from one generation to the next, point to African *griots* and indigenous storytelling practices to emphasize the deep roots of oral narratives in human cultures.⁷ Social reformers of the nineteenth century used journalistic interviewing methods to learn about the living and working conditions of the poor in European and North American urban slums, while historians and sociologists interviewed immigrant settlers.⁸ By the late 1880s, when the first recording machine (the Edison Perfected Phonograph) became available to the public, researchers recorded “sounds of historical and cultural value to Canadians.”⁹ Among these sound historians were ethnologists and folklorists like Marius Barbeau, who recorded indigenous songs and stories for Canada’s National Museum of Man before the First World War.¹⁰

Historians of Canada understood that “old-timers” had valuable knowledge to share – long before Allan Nevins “invented” oral history at

Columbia University in 1948. In an address to the organizational meeting of the Regina Historical Association in 1922, Arthur S. Morton, a historian of Western Canada and later the founder of Saskatchewan's provincial archives, explained:

We are now at the beginning of a movement to preserve the early history of this province. We have conducted an experiment in Saskatoon by which a small group of only five, of which some were old-timers and some professors of the university, meet regularly with a typist present. Some old-timer is the guest of the evening. We all sit around and smoke and ask questions about the early days and after a while the old-timer's tongue is loosened and he tells us of things that happened while the typist takes it down in shorthand. Finally copies are given to each member of the group. It is felt that some such machinery for gathering the stories of our pioneers should be set up in the different districts of the province and this year we are trying to do it.¹¹

In the first half of the twentieth century, journalists as well as social scientists refined their recording and interviewing methods. Journalists, working for the CBC and its predecessor, the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC), recorded "historical broadcasts," "oral memoirs and interviews," and "the sounds of war" during the 1930s and 1940s. Social scientists seeking "objective" forms of interrogation for polls and surveys developed standard questionnaires and formulas for posing questions. In the 1940s and 1950s, university-based North American oral historians developed methods with which they might document people's lived experiences more extensively. By the 1960s oral historians in the United States and Canadian archivists, as well as CBC journalists and NFB filmmakers, had completed large projects and created a number of guidelines for oral history interviewing.¹² They also developed standards for preservation and archiving, including best practices for transcription, which became more widely accessible in the 1970s.¹³ The early Canadian oral history movement was driven and shaped by provincial and national archivists. National archivist Leo LaClare headed the Oral History Committee of the Canadian Historical Association, which became the Canadian Oral History Association (COHA). LaClare was COHA's first president. Archivists were instrumental in organizing annual national conferences throughout the 1970s and they founded the *COHA Journal* (in 1995 renamed *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale*).¹⁴

At conferences and in the pages of the journal, Canadian oral historians hotly debated best practices, the status of oral history as historical evidence, and the role of the interviewer in the creation of the source and in the relationship with the interviewee. The contentious status of oral history was evident from the start. In the 1970s, practitioners could not even agree on a name for their professional association: Was it the “Aural” or the “Oral” History Association? Archivists from the Aural History division of the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, among others, advocated “aural history,” because it was the “more encompassing term,” including oral histories, other oral sources, and other historical sound (aural) material.¹⁵ Those advocating “oral” history, however, quickly won the argument, renaming the association at the second national conference held in St John’s, Newfoundland, in 1975.¹⁶

Despite such disagreements and disparate approaches, objectives, and practitioners (including archivists, historians, geographers, ethnographers, ethnomusicologists, folklorists, educators, museum curators, journalists, broadcasters, and authors), oral historians have developed a widely shared methodology for conducting interviews. While “methodology” covers a broad spectrum of tools, tactics, strategies, and approaches, a number of established steps in creating excellent oral history interviews are generally accepted. Before interviewing informants, oral historians conduct preliminary research in public and private archives and libraries to learn more about the interviewees and the historical context in which they lived. During the interview, interviewees may wish to share personal documents such as correspondence, photographs, diaries, or government documents. For project-related interviews, historians develop a research question that goes beyond documenting the interviewees’ lived experiences. Oral historians may open interviews with a broad, open-ended question, such as “tell me your life story” or “tell me about your childhood” or begin in a more structured way, asking closed questions such as “when and where were you born?”¹⁷ Either way, they will attempt to stimulate the narration of stories that provide richly detailed accounts of lived experiences rather than simply recording short responses as in a questionnaire or survey. Brian Calliou’s article, which opens this *Reader* (chapter 1) provides an excellent overview and introduction to the method of interviewing. Unlike standard guides, however, Calliou’s article considers particularly the Canadian indigenous perspective, from which both beginners and seasoned practitioners will benefit.

From the 1950s forward, oral historians found that in their relationship with interviewees they could not claim to be detached and objective.

In the context of the postwar dominance of positivism and quantification in the social sciences, this was no longer an easy assertion to make. Nevertheless, oral historians argued that the interview was an interactive communication and an interpersonal, human experience that often left both parties changed. With the rise of social history and the move from elite interviewing to interviewing marginalized groups, historians became increasingly concerned about the ethics of the interviewer/narrator relationship. In 1974 Pauline Jewett, then president of Simon Fraser University, in her welcoming address to the first national gathering of oral historians in Canada and the constituting meeting of the Canadian Oral History Association, pointed to “the unique moral bond between interviewer and interviewee”:¹⁸ “Aural historians have a special obligation to their informants which does not exist in other forms of research. The tape recorder obtains information from a living person whose recollections can then be utilized and interpreted in a variety of ways that the subject may not have considered.”¹⁹ One response in the direction of negotiating this “moral bond,” as the US American oral historian Michael Frisch proposed in 1990, was the acknowledgment of “shared authority.”²⁰ From giving interviewees a chance to edit their interview transcripts and providing them with copies of recordings, this type of collaboration has since been expanded to include interviewees in the research and ownership of the projects. In “Sharing Authority with Baba,” chapter 2 of this *Reader*, Stacey Zembrzycki explores the methodological problems of sharing authority in the interviewing process. She considers some of the challenges faced by interviewers whose involvement goes beyond giving back to the community to their becoming dependent on community insiders to gain access to interviewees and who wish to shape the research and its outcomes according to their own agendas.

Concerns about the “moral bond” and “sharing authority” were mostly negotiated between the interviewer and interviewee. In the 1990s, however, ethics became a major preoccupation at universities in North America. Before the 1980s, medical and clinical experiments on human subjects and fieldwork research among indigenous cultures had sometimes compromised the dignity of men and women participating in the research, particularly if experiments or research were conducted without their knowledge or consent. Minority and oppressed populations and social groups – women, working-class, ethnic and racial minorities, immigrants, the populations of the Global South, and indigenous people – were particularly vulnerable to exploitation by researchers.²¹ In Canada, the three major research councils established a tri-council policy in research ethics

in 1998. While important for ethical research, the strict new guidelines at times threatened the integrity of oral history projects, particularly when ethics review boards asked researchers to anonymize interviews and destroy them at the end of the project. In chapter 3, Nancy Janovicek writes about these concerns in the Canadian context. For this *Reader*, she extensively revised an earlier article on the subject to correspond with the newest version of the tri-council policies known as *TCP\\$22*.

Like ethical concerns, legal questions have loomed large in oral history research, particularly in the United States. Until recently, Canadian researchers had no guidance specific to the Canadian legal system, except for a short article by Jill Jarvis-Tonus published in the *Forum* in 1992. For this *Reader*, Jarvis-Tonus has substantially revised and updated her original article, which appears as chapter 4. It now serves as the only guide for oral historians to legal issues, such as copyright and ownership, confidentiality and privacy, and libel and slander, pertaining to Canadian context. Together, these four chapters in the first section of the *Reader* address the many sides of oral history as a research method and offer introductory guidance to orient novices, provide reference for experienced practitioners, and illuminate Canadian practices that will be useful to both national and international audiences.

In our second section we turn our attention to the uses to which oral history can be applied. Historians and researchers employ oral history interviews for several purposes, using both extant collections and their own interviews, and paradigm shifts have taken place in the way historians have used and considered oral history interviews.²³ Until the late 1970s, the most widespread approach to interpreting oral histories was to mine them for factual information about the past. Oral history interviews provided information where established archives were silent. Social historians particularly began to interview women, workers, migrants, and other minorities to find out about the experiences of groups that had been traditionally marginalized and oppressed. While state documentation in criminal and court records, welfare agency records, health records, and immigration records provided information about members of these groups as soon as they became a “problem” for the state, there was little in these sources that revealed the personal perspectives of these people or told us about their everyday lives. Oral histories provided a great resource for these personal perspectives, even though historians knew that they could not simply take their narrators’ words at face value. As with all other sources, they needed to examine the reliability and credibility

of their informants' words. Nevertheless, the possibility of learning about the past from people's memories, particularly in the absence of other (reliable) sources, has continued to be a major motivation for researchers. Despite the massive growth of academic and public history since the 1970s, researchers continue to document the experiences of groups previously overlooked.

With the rise of critical theories such as Marxism, structuralism, and feminism, oral historians began to view their sources through new lenses. In the 1970s, following the lead of ethnographers, anthropologists, linguists, and other cultural studies scholars who were emphasizing the importance of language in conveying one's perception of the world, oral historians began to view the narratives they recorded no longer simply as pools of factual information about the past, but rather as narratives constructed in the moment of the interview and in a dialogic (rather than monologic) format. US American historian Ronald J. Grele called these oral history dialogues "conversational narratives." He also asked how oral histories could help us understand the way ideologies shaped worldviews.²⁴ Italian oral historian Luisa Passerini explored the silences of Italian working-class narratives, while her compatriot colleague Alessandro Portelli illuminated the peculiarities of oral history and pondered the meaning to be found in "misrememberings" or factually inaccurate memories.²⁵ Increasingly, oral historians paid attention to the dynamics of the interviewer-interviewee relationship to make sense of the stories they were told.²⁶

Despite these important changes and turning points in the understanding of oral history, the development has not been as linear and as much of a "story of progress" as Canadian and international oral historians have at times implied.²⁷ Not only were labour and working-class historians at the forefront of theorizing history but they were often pioneers of oral history as well. Gil Levine's 1977 interview with union leader Patrick Lenihan is as much a testimony to this long and rich tradition as the project from the early 1980s by a group of retired coal miners from Vancouver Island, who wrote a book and a play based on their oral histories with over a hundred miners.²⁸ As Joan Sangster demonstrates in chapter 5, the earlier "recovery" approach to history was much more reflective and theoretically enriched than is often assumed. Considering the complex ways in which working-class historians in Canada have used oral histories over the past half century, Sangster argues that the narratives that activist historians wrote about their interviewees were shaped by concerns about ethical and political responsibilities as well as relationships with interviewees.

Similarly, and often in connection with working-class history, women's historians rewrote history from a theoretical perspective that employed feminist theories as well as a more self-refl ctive approach to interviewing. Several early research and archival projects focused on the experiences of pioneer women and female unionists. By the 1980s, feminist historians such as Denyse Baillargeon, Julie Cruikshank, Franca Iacovetta, Joy Parr, and Joan Sangster gave the fi ld its major impetus.²⁹In chapter 6, Kristina Llewellyn explores how different feminist theoretical frameworks can be used and combined to interpret oral history interviews – in this case, interviews with school teachers – in more nuanced ways. She draws both on a materialist feminist framework, which Sangster also embraced, as well as on post-structuralist approaches, which are particularly apt for studying language, narrative, and identity. Other chapters, including those by Zembrzycki, Elise Chenier, and Pamela Sugiman, illuminate the variety of ways in which oral history has contributed to writing women's and gender history.

Other social historians have used oral history to write the history of immigrants and ethnic groups. Since 1976, for instance, the Multicultural History Society of Ontario has collected over nine thousand hours of interviews with members of over sixty ethnocultural groups. Correspondingly, the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, has been collecting interviews with immigrants, as have many other public archives and private collections. In chapter 7, Alexander Freund investigates both the memories of migrants and the migration of memories. On the basis of individual interviews and a group interview, he considers how family members of three different generations collectively construct a family memory around the oldest generation's experiences of growing up in Nazi Germany and migrating to Canada in the 1950s. The chapters by Zembrzycki and Sugiman offer further glimpses into Canada's rich immigrant and ethnic history.

More recently, in Canada perhaps more than anywhere else, research in indigenous oral history has brought important new perspectives to the fi ld. One prominent aspect of this new perspective is the Canadian Supreme Court's decision to admit First Nations' oral tradition as evidence in land claims cases. Th s decision from 1997 has led to a flurry of oral history recordings, conducted by a wide range of researchers.³⁰Brian Calliou's chapter in this book gives a good introduction to this decision and demonstrates that indigenous peoples are increasingly conducting research into their own oral histories. In 2014, for example, the Oral History Centre and the Indigenous Studies Department at the University of

Winnipeg brought to a conclusion the project “ininiwag dibaa�imowag: First Nations Men’s Digital Stories on the Intergenerational Experiences of Residential Schools,” funded by the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. Indigenous scholars used digital storytelling and oral history to help the children of survivors of Indian Residential Schools understand their own experiences and those of their parents. The researchers developed a teaching kit that is available to communities free of charge.³¹

Much other work on indigenous oral history was influenced by folklorists and anthropologists rather than by historians and archivists because, while the latter continued to view oral history mostly as a means of filling gaps in historical knowledge, the former were seeking a more complex understanding of oral history as a source of multiple layers of meaning about the past and the present. Indigenous understandings of what ought or ought not to be recorded challenged Western historians’ assumptions about the necessity of preserving all information in the form of textual archives. Mi’kmaq scholars, for example, noted that the writing down of oral tradition was perceived as a threat to their communities, because it erased the need to pass information on orally to the next generation.³² Julie Cruikshank, in her chapter on Native American narrative strategies (chapter 8), explores the disparate ways in which stories were told, used, and shared among elders in the Yukon Territory. In this case, narrative content was not transparent in itself but depended on the narrative form and the situation in which stories were told and shared. The chapters by Calliou, Cruikshank, and Wheeler give important insights into the diverse understandings of oral stories in indigenous cultures and societies. Indeed, the focus on indigenous oral history and oral tradition is a theme that runs through this *Reader* and sets it clearly apart from other national and international oral history collections.

Folklorists and ethnographers, who stood at the inception of oral history in Canada, have continued to exert an important influence on historians’ understanding of spoken and sung word as linguistic and cultural symbols; as symbols, texts were neither transparent windows onto the past nor unbroken reflections of past realities. Symbols needed to be decoded; thus, greater attention to language and culture was required. French Canadian scholars in particular became interested in collecting life stories. As in Canadian historiography at large, French-Canadian oral history developed separately from English Canadian oral history, and English-speaking historians took little note of the works of their Franco-phone colleagues. This disconnect between Anglo-Canadian and Franco-Canadian research is evident not only in this *Reader* but also in the pages

of the *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale*, which, despite its bilingual name, has not yet succeeded in becoming a bilingual journal.³³

The focus of the third section is preservation and presentation, particularly the archiving of interviews. Issues related to archiving have been integral to the whole field of oral history and perhaps constitute what most sets it apart from other social science and humanities interviewing. Oral historians strive to transcribe – or at least summarize – their interviews and make them available to other researchers and later generations. Since the 1960s, they have developed standards and best practices. This emphasis was especially pronounced in Canada, where the oral history movement was led by archivists from the early 1970s until the early 1990s, when federal budget cuts forced many archivists out of the field. In those two decades, archivists ensured that oral history collections, such as those of the CBC, were properly preserved and made accessible to researchers. Archivists also conducted their own interviews, thus adding important records to their archives. The Sound Heritage program at the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, for instance, collected oral histories and made them accessible through publications and recordings.³⁴ There has long been a debate among oral historians as to whether transcribing – which is the most time-consuming and thus most expensive aspect of oral history projects – is the best way to use sparse funds. New digital technologies have raised hopes in some quarters that interviews – increasingly captured on video rather than audio – can be indexed and thus made more accessible without transcription. While Elise Chenier in her chapter on creating an archive of lesbian oral history (chapter 9) explores the importance of preserving extant collections, Alexander Freund (chapter 10) illuminates the ways scholars in the social sciences and humanities can make use of extant collections.

One major use of collections or presentation of previously created oral histories has been in the field of education. From the 1960s, teachers like Margaret Andrews at Capilano College and Alfred and Jessie Haché have used oral histories in the classroom, and archives collaborated with teachers' unions to create teaching materials that incorporate oral histories.³⁵ They quickly appreciated the power of the voice. To amplify this lesson, they often brought eyewitnesses into their classrooms to speak to their students. Some even involved students in the production of oral history interviews. More recently, scholars have delved more deeply into the ramifications of using oral history for educational purposes. In chapter 11, Stacey Zembrzycki and Steven High explore the experiences of Holocaust

survivors who migrated to Canada and became active in Holocaust education. Rather than focusing on their survival stories, they investigate their postwar lives and in particular their experiences of telling their stories to young Canadian students. As in the case of using oral history for research, oral history in the classroom is not a source that can be used without providing context. Oral sources are never self-evident. And even if a class of students listens to the same story, they will all hear different stories, depending on their own background, experiences, and listening skills. In chapter 12, Bronwen Low and Emmanuelle Sonntag develop a pedagogy of listening to the stories of refugees. They introduce readers to innovative curriculum reforms happening in Quebec that will highlight the need for oral history to have a central place in human rights education.

With the rise of social history and historians' increasing concern for writing a more inclusive, democratic history, oral history since the 1960s has been championed as a tool of activism and advocacy, the "method" to which we turn in the fourth section. The title of Paul Thompson's book, *The Voice of the Past*, became the mantra of much of the early movement. "Giving voice" to the silenced became an important objective in the work of social historians and activists. Sharing authority was another mantra – and collaborative work another imperative – of activist oral history. Academics questioned the role of scholars and their claims of scientific objectivity. Furthermore, the unequal relationship of power inherent in any oral history interview – usually privileging the academic who has access to funding, skills, and knowledge, and who builds a career on the harvest of his research – called into question any easy claims at sharing authority.³⁶

Scholars from several groups made it clear that there was no single solution to these complex ethical and political dilemmas. Among them were indigenous scholars, who, as Winona Wheeler shows in chapter 13, grappled with the role of settler archives and the lack of oral tradition in their attempt to reconstruct and write indigenous history. While oral historians may have felt good about giving back to the community – whether in the form of recordings or skills – they quickly came up against certain limits if, as Pamela Sugiman details in chapter 14, their interviewees had their own agendas that did not correspond to or even contradicted those of the historian. And when historians encountered powerful state institutions, especially in the health sector, they sometimes had to negotiate other relationships of power, as Claudia Malacrida demonstrates in chapter 15. Her chapter is one of the few contributions to the field of oral

history that intersects with disability studies.³⁷ Finally, as Joy Parr argues in the concluding chapter, the whole idea of a scholar initiating a process of sharing authority – at least with someone from a “vulnerable population” – is highly problematic, because it presumes the narrators’ wish or intention to collaborate when in reality all the historian can and should do is to stand by and hear the testimony. Parr challenges the very role of the oral historian as advocate.

All chapters in this *Reader* engage with issues that affect oral history practitioners around the world. They do so from a specific space and place, informed by local, regional, national, and global perspectives. Thus, these are Canadian contributions to global debates that affect practices in specific contexts.

This *Reader* seeks to stimulate dialogue and debate among Canadian oral history practitioners. It provides an institutional memory of past and current practices by presenting some of the best oral history work produced in Canada over the past quarter century. Over the past few decades, a number of English-language readers, anthologies, and handbooks have showcased the diversity of oral history theory and practice in the United States, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, France, Germany, Argentina, and other countries. Canadian oral history, however, has been noticeably absent from these collections. Some readers may be familiar with the internationally successful *Oral History Reader*, edited by Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson and in its second edition since 2006. Of the sixty-two articles published in the *Oral History Reader*’s two editions, however, only two were written by Canadian authors and none are represented in the second edition. Similarly, the two editions of *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology* included no text by Canadian authors. The two recently published handbooks to the practice include not a single text by a Canadian author.³⁸ These books, which have set the standards for the international field of oral history, entirely bypass the developments of Canadian scholarship. As a result, Canadian perspectives are virtually absent from international debates on oral history. The publication of a Canadian reader, therefore, brings an important addition that has been neglected by the international oral history movement. But this is not an exercise in nationalism. If Canadians had nothing to say about oral history or could contribute nothing meaningful to the international debate, we would not have bothered to assemble this *Reader*. Over the course of several years, as we talked about the state of oral history in Canada, however, we agreed that Canadians had much to contribute to the debate.

Some of it has been published in the *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale*, and more in various collections.³⁹

Until now, Canadian students and teachers discussing oral history in seminars, and researchers and practitioners wishing to learn about oral history theories and methods in Canada, have had no resource to guide them. We hope our *Reader* will overcome this lack. It is the first comprehensive collection of articles on oral history within the Canadian context and by Canadian scholars. The collection will be of use to a growing number of students and educators in high school through to adult education and provide a resource for practitioners in the areas of community research and public policy development. Our goal is to raise awareness both within and outside Canada about Canada's contribution to the field. At the same time, we hope that this *Reader* will serve as a springboard for new debates within Canada and as a bridge to re-connect Canadian practitioners with their colleagues throughout the Americas, Europe, the Commonwealth and other parts of the world where oral history is flourishing. We hope also that *The Canadian Oral History Reader* will awaken in the broader Canadian public a new awareness of oral history, and acquaint a global audience with the rich sources of Canadian oral history.

The *Reader* comes at a time that sees a renaissance of oral history in Canada, with a string of new institutions, projects, and initiatives that provide stimulus and innovation beyond Canada's boundaries. As elsewhere in the world, there has been a significant growth of oral history in Canada over the past two decades. Despite continued skepticism in a few small quarters of traditional historians, oral history – along with life histories, storytelling, and testimony – has become a mainstay in documentaries, museum exhibits, multimedia and online presentations, education, therapy, and even business and administration. Permanent institutions such as the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, the Canadian War Museum, the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling at Concordia University, and the Oral History Centre at the University of Winnipeg, as well as large projects such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools, the Montreal Life Stories Project (Concordia University), and Nindibaajimomin – Digital Storytelling on the Inter-generational Experiences of Residential Schools (University of Winnipeg) – are just a few among dozens of new publicly and privately funded initiatives that envisage documenting the lived experiences of Canadians.⁴⁰ As in other parts of the world, Canadian society now acknowledges and cherishes subjective individual experiences as integral to understanding Canadian history

and culture as well as to charting Canada's political, social, cultural, and even economic development in the future.

Much of this new interest in oral stories is driven by digital technologies. Recording people's memories, archiving them, and disseminating them online has become affordable and feasible for almost everyone. An increasing number of Canadians flock to oral history workshops, buy guides or look them up online, and seek guidance from oral historians in their attempts to reconstruct the histories of their families and communities. Students of all ages now regularly interview people and create oral history projects, as do community historians and activists. This flurry of activity presents oral historians with new questions and challenges about the practical, ethical, and legal aspects of their methods, the meanings of their sources, the technologies for archiving and disseminating their research, and the role oral history plays – or should play – in advocacy. We hope that this *Reader* provides the base and the beginning for a renewal of the conversation among Canadian oral historians, a conversation that needs to be integrated into a larger global discussion about the new aims of oral history in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

- 1 *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, 11 December 1997, 1075–6. Chief Justice Antonio Lamer explaining why oral history is admissible as evidence in court.
- 2 "Interview with Barry Broadfoot, reprinted from *Access Magazine*, winter 1978," *Oral History Association Journal* 3, no. 2 (1978): 26–8, quote 28.
- 3 Franca Iacovetta, "Post-Modern Ethnography, Historical Materialism, and Decentring the (Male) Authorial Voice: A Feminist Conversation," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 32, no. 64 (1999): 275–93, at 285–6.
- 4 For a survey of the use of oral sources in global historiography, see Daniel Woolf, *A Global History of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); the most extensive overview of the development of oral history is in Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd edition (Oxford University Press, 2000), 25–81; on the beginnings of oral history as a research method in the United States, see Jerrold Hirsch, "Before Columbia: The FWP and American Oral History Research," *Oral History Review* 34, no. 2 (2007): 1–16; Allan Nevins, "Oral History: How and Why It Was Born," *Wilson Library Bulletin* 40 (March 1966): 600–1; Louis Starr, "Oral History," *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences* 20 (New York: Dekker, 1977), 440–63; a recent critical analysis of the development of oral history worldwide is provided by Alistair Thomson, "Four Paradigm Transformations in

- Oral History," *Oral History Review* 34, no. 1 (2007): 49–70; for an attempt to position the development of the oral history interview in the broader scope of modernity, see Alexander Freund, "Confessing Animals: Toward a Longue Durée History of the Oral History Interview," *Oral History Review* (spring 2014): 1–26; surveys of oral history in Canada include Ronald Labelle, "Reflections on Thirty Years of Oral History in Canada," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* 25 (2005): 7–14; Alexander Freund, "Oral History in Canada: A Paradox," in *Canada in Grainau/Le Canada à Grainau: A Multidisciplinary Survey after 30 Years*, edited by Klaus-Dieter Ertler and Hartmut Lutz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), 305–35.
- 5 Richard Lochhead, "Three Approaches to Oral History: The Journalistic, the Academic, and the Archival," *Canadian Oral History Association Journal* (from here: *COHAJournal*) 1 (1975–76): 5–12.
 - 6 Michael Riordan, *An Unauthorized Biography of the World: Oral History on the Front Lines* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2004), 1–2.
 - 7 Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 18–22; Valerie Raleigh Yow, *Recording Oral History. A Practical Guide for Social Sciences*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005), 2.
 - 8 James Bennett, *Oral History and Delinquency: The Rhetoric of Criminology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Robert Sellar, *The History of the County of Huntingdon and of the Seigniories of Chateaugay and Beauharnois, From Their First Settlement to the Year 1888* (Huntingdon, QC: Canadian Gleaner, 1888), preface reprinted in *COHAJournal* 4, no. 1 (1979): 22–3; Heinz Lehmann, *The German Canadians, 1750–1937: Immigration, Settlement and Culture*, translated, edited, and introduced by Gerhard P. Bassler (St John's: Jesperson Press, 1986).
 - 9 Leo LaClare, "Introduction," *COHAJournal* 1 (1975–76): 3.
 - 10 Leo LaClare, "Directions in Canadian Aural/Oral History," *Sound Heritage* 4, no. 1 (1975): 6.
 - 11 Quoted in Ian E. Wilson, Provincial Archivist, "Foreword," in Krzysztof M. Gebhard, *Community as Classroom: A Teacher's Practical Guide to Oral History* (Saskatchewan Archives Reference Series; 5), (Regina and Saskatoon: Saskatchewan Archives Board, 1985), iii; "About the Archives," Saskatchewan Archives Board website, <http://www.saskarchives.com/about-archives> (accessed 23 June 2014).
 - 12 LaClare, "Directions," 6; Richard Lochhead, email correspondence with Alexander Freund, 26 June 2008; W.J. Langlois, Derek Reimer, Janet Cauthers, and Allen Specht, eds., *A Guide to Aural History Research* (Victoria, BC: Provincial Archives of British Columbia, 1976); Willa K. Baum, *Oral History for the Local Historical Society* (Stockton: Conference of California Historical Societies, 1969).

- 13 Willa K. Baum, *Transcribing and Editing Oral History* (Nashville: American Association of State and Local History, 1977).
- 14 Wilma MacDonald, “Some Reminiscences of COHA” *Oral History Forum d’histoire orale* 25 (2005): 15–28, 16.
- 15 W.J. Langlois, “Notes from Aural History,” *Sound Heritage* 4, no. 1 (1975): 1.
- 16 MacDonald, “Some Reminiscences,” 16.
- 17 Almut Leh, “Ethical Problems in Research Involving Contemporary Witnesses,” translated by Edith Burley, *Oral History Forum d’histoire orale* 29 (2009): 1–14; Alexander von Plato, “Contemporary Witnesses and the Historical Profession: Remembrance, Communicative Transmission, and Collective Memory in Qualitative History,” translated by Edith Burley, *Oral History Forum d’histoire orale* 29 (2009): 1–27; Linda Shopes, “Oral History and the Study of Communities: Problems, Paradoxes, and Possibilities,” *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 2 (September 2002): 588–98.
- 18 Langlois, “Notes,” 2.
- 19 Pauline Jewett, “Foreword,” *Sound Heritage* 4, no. 1 (1975): v–vi, v.
- 20 Michael Frisch, *A Shared Authority: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); more recently, see High et al., “Sharing Authority: Community-University Collaboration in Oral History, Digital Storytelling, and Engaged Scholarship,” special issue of *Journal of Canadian Studies* 43, no. 1 (winter 2009), guest edited by Steven High, Lisa Ndejuru, and Kristen O’Hare.
- 21 Will C. van den Hoonaard and Deborah K. van den Hoonaard, *Essentials of Thinking Ethically in Qualitative Research* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2013); Robert Borofsky, *Yanomami. The Fierce Controversy and What We Can Learn from It* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).
- 22 All university-based researchers are required to complete the TCPΩ Tutorial Course on Research Ethics (CORE), which provides excellent documentation of unethical research in the past: <http://www.ethics.gc.ca/eng/education/tutorial-didacticiel> (accessed 23 June 2014). For a critique of such institutional research ethics processes, see Will C. van den Hoonaard, *Seduction of Ethics: Transforming the Social Sciences* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); see also: Rosamond Rhodes, “Rethinking Research Ethics,” *The American Journal of Bioethics* 10, no. 10 (2010): 19–36; Greg Koski, “Rethinking Research Ethics, Again: Casuistry, Phronesis, and the Continuing Challenges of Human Research,” *The American Journal of Bioethics* 10, no. 10 (2010): 37–9.
- 23 Thomson, “Four Paradigm Transformations,” 2007; Ronald J. Grele, “Commentary,” *Oral History Review* 34, no. 2 (2007): 121–3.
- 24 Ronald J. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound: The Art of Oral History*, 2nd revised and expanded edition (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1985).

- 25 Luisa Passerini, "Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism," *History Workshop Journal* 8, no. 1 (1979): 82–108; Alessandro Portelli, "The Peculiarities of Oral History," *History Workshop Journal* 12, no. 1 (1981): 96–107; Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany: SUNYPress, 1991).
- 26 Eva M. McMahan and Kim Lacy Rogers, eds., *Interactive Oral History Interviewing* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994); Eva M. McMahan, "A Conversation Analytic Approach to Oral History Interviewing," in *Handbook of Oral History*, edited by Thomas L. Charlton et al. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 336–56.
- 27 Thomson, "Four Paradigm Transformations," 2007; Grele, "Commentary," 2007; Steven High, "Sharing Authority in the Writing of Canadian History: The Case of Oral History," in *Contesting Clio's Craft: New Directions and Debates in Canadian History*, edited by Chris Dummitt and Michael Dawson (London: Institute for the Study of the Americas, University of London, 2009), 21–46; Bryan D. Palmer, "Review of *Contesting Clio's Craft*," *American Historical Review* 115, no. 2 (April 2010): 497–8.
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- 30 Lori Ann Roness and Kent McNeil, "Legalizing Oral History: Proving Aboriginal Claims in Canadian Courts," *Journal of the West* 39, no. 3 (2000): 66–74; Chris Preston, "A Past of Tragic Stories: The (Non-)Treatment of Native Peoples' Oral Histories in Canada," *Undercurrent* 2, no. 1 (March 2005): 54–64; Mary Ann Pylypcuk, "The Value of Aboriginal Records as Legal Evidence in Canada: An Examination of Sources," *Archivaria* 32 (1991): 51–77; Joan Lovisek, "Transmission Difficulties: The Use and Abuse of Oral History in Aboriginal Claims," in *Papers of the Thirty-Third Algonquian Conference*, edited by H.C. Wolfart (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Papers of the Algonquian Conference, 2002); Brian Thom, "Aboriginal Rights and Title in Canada After 'Delgamuukw,' Part 1: Oral Traditions and Anthropological Evidence in the Courtroom," *Native Studies Review* 14, no. 1 (2001): 1–26; Brian Thom, "Aboriginal Rights and Title in Canada After 'Delgamuukw.' Part 2: Anthropological Perspectives on Rights, Tests, Infringement and Justification," *Native Studies Review* 14, no. 2 (2001): 1–42.

- 31 For further information, see http://www.oralhistorycentre.ca/projects/ininiwag-dibaajimowag-fi_st-nations-men-and-inter-generational-experiences-residential.
- 32 Isabelle Shay, "Interviewing Tribal Elders and Native Women," *COHA Journal* 9 (1989): 4–5.
- 33 Freund, "Paradox," 316, 326. *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale* is an open-access journal available at www.oralhistoryforum.ca.
- 34 Richard Lochhead, "Directions in Oral History in Canada," *COHA Journal* 6 (1983): 3–6; Freund, "Paradox," 313, 316.
- 35 For early examples in Canada, see "Aural History in B.C. Studies," *Sound Heritage* 4, no. 1 (1975): 8–15; "Aural History in Primary and Secondary Schools," *Sound Heritage* 4, no. 1 (1975): 16–19; Alfred and Jessie Haché, "Oral History at Petite Rivière Elementary School, Nova Scotia," *COHA Journal* 14 (1994): 11–20.
- 36 Frisch, *A Shared Authority*, 1990; High et al., "Sharing Authority"; Anna Sheftel and Stacey Zembrzycki, eds., *Oral History Off the Record* (New York: Palgrave, 2013); Freund, "Confessing Animals," 2014.
- 37 But see the innovative, oral history-based film, "The Inmates Are Running the Asylum," available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JwyRU1svrA> (accessed 23 June 2014). Lanny Beckman and Megan Davies, "Democracy Is a Very Radical Idea," in *Mad Matters: A Critical Reader in Canadian Mad Studies*, edited by Brenda A. LeFrançois, Robert Menzies, and Geoffrey Reaume (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2013), 49–63.
- 38 David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum, eds., *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, 1st and 2nd editions (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1984, 1996); Sherna Berger and Daphne Patai, eds., *Women's Words: The Feminist Practice of Oral History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991); Alistair Thomson and Robert Perks, eds., *The Oral History Reader*, 1st and 2nd editions (New York: Routledge, 1998/2006); Thomas L. Charlton et al., *Handbook of Oral History* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006); Donald A Ritchie, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 39 The complete run of the journal is freely available online at www.oralhistoryforum.ca. Recent collections with significant Canadian content include Alexander Freund and Alistair Thomson, eds., *Oral History and Photography* (New York: Palgrave, 2012); Sheftel and Zembrzycki, *Oral History*, 2013.
- 40 On the Montreal Life Stories project, see Steven High, *Oral History at the Crossroads: Sharing Life Stories of Survival and Displacement* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2014).