

Oral History Projects

If you are interested in learning history from people who were there, there are several oral history projects you could consider checking out. First there is the Veterans History Project at loc.gov/vets. The project started in 2000 and includes Veterans stories from WWI, WWII, the Cold War, Korean War, Vietnam War, Grenada, Panama, Operation Restore Hope, Persian Gulf War, War on Terrorism, Afghan War, Iraq War plus several other small operations. On the Library of Congress website you can listen to stories, read transcriptions, view video and see correspondences and other material. It is an excellent site and I've used video from the site to present Veterans' stories. This collection is a part of the Library of Congress' digital collections which also include a collection on the Civil Rights in the US, a collection of Montana folk life, American workers project and collections from both Rhode Island and Georgia. A special collection called Voices Remembering Slavery: Freed People Tell Their Stories is very interesting.

In Minnesota, we have a website called Minnesota Reflections, reflections.mndigital.org. They host a database of digitized original materials shared by cultural heritage organizations across our state. Items include images, text, audio, film and more. There are 189 contributing organizations to the collection which now has over 50,000 items. It is a good spot to do some research on Minnesota history. The Heritage Education Commission is one of the contributing organizations.

The Heritage Education Commission has two oral history projects; regional and Veterans. All of the recordings and many of the transcripts are on the web at heritageed.com. The regional collection includes men and women of the region who were interviewed by volunteers. The interviews are in categories; Agriculture, Arts, Business, Communications, Education, Government and Politics, Homemaking, Law and Law Enforcement, Medicine, Religion and Service Organizations. These interviews were conducted in the 1980s. Starting in 2001, Veterans oral histories were collected and added to the website. Currently, stories told by Veterans of WWII, Korea, Vietnam and Peacetime are available in both audio and pdf transcript format. Both projects include interviews of local and regional people.

Oral histories are somewhat unique because they are of the people who were there. In the case of the Veterans histories, they are not of the Generals and Admirals but of the common soldier, sailor, marine and airman who did his and her duty and then returned to civilian life.