

Historic Vienna, Inc.



Oral History Guide

View Vienna Oral Histories at
www.hvioralhistory.blogspot.com

Visit us at the
Freeman Store and Museum

131 Church St. NE, Vienna, VA 22180
703-938-5187

www.historicviennainc.org

Open Wednesday-Sunday, 12:00-4:00PM

*The Freeman Store is listed on
The Virginia Landmarks Register
and
The National Register of Historic Places*

*Strengthening Community Through
an Awareness of Vienna's Past*

The Historic Vienna Oral History Project

Initiated in the summer of 2013, the Historic Vienna, Inc. Oral History Project is dedicated to facilitating the preservation of local history by and for Vienna's community members.

We aim to capture a sense of the local past through its existence in the living present, using the words and personal experiences of Vienna and greater Vienna residents.

Topics of particular interest to the Historic Vienna Oral History Project include personal experiences with community organizations, transit services, local institutions, local events and family traditions held in the area, experiences and opinions of Vienna's growth and gradual restructuring, political climate, small-town atmosphere, and what it is like to grow up in Vienna.

How to Get Involved

For questions, comments, and volunteer opportunities, please email

historicviennava@gmail.com

For Further Information:

Visit the Historic Vienna, Inc. Website:

www.historicviennainc.org

To View Vienna Oral Histories:

Visit the Oral History Blog:

www.hvioralhistory.blogspot.com

Thanks for your interest in the project!

Section 1: How to Identify and Contact Interview Candidates

Do you know someone in Vienna with a strong connection to the town? We want to hear his/her story!

Our collection of oral histories engages with the lives of Vienna residents who have shaped Vienna into what it is today. Here are some qualities to look for in your potential interviewee:

- Has s/he participated in any of Vienna's major events? (Ex: Halloween Parade, ViVa Vienna...)
- Does s/he have a strong connection to certain building structures or historic events within the town?
- Did s/he live in Vienna before, during, or immediately following WWII?
- Did s/he experience Vienna's transition from rural farming community to DC-extension over the course of the twentieth century?
- Is s/he a part of any of Vienna's government and/or community organizations or businesses, whether currently in operation or not?
Some examples: Town Council, Rotary, Optimists, Volunteer Fire Department, Churches, athletic groups, etc
- Does s/he have a unique perspective on the formation and restructuring of the town?

If your potential interviewee doesn't fit the mold of these suggestions, we might still want to hear from them! If you're uncertain whether or not your oral history will fit into the Historic Vienna Oral History Project, **send an email to historicviennava@gmail.com** with *Oral History* in the subject line.

Section 2: Equipment: What's Available, How to Borrow It

With a Historic Vienna, Inc. Oral History Project Coordinator accompanying you to your interview, you are welcome to use the oral history recording equipment owned by Historic Vienna, Inc.

Please email historicviennava@gmail.com to arrange a time for a board member to assist you to with the equipment and the interview.

Historic Vienna, Inc. has:

- **1 Camcorder** (Panasonic HC-V750)
- **1 Portable Digital Audio Recorder** (TASCAM DR-05)
- **1 Tripod**
- **1 Pair of Headphones** (SONY MDR-7506)

Uses of Equipment:

- **Camcorder:** for recording video
- **Audio Recorder:** for audio-only recording; can be used in addition to camcorder as video-backup
- **Tripod:** to keep camera poised and stationary
- **Headphones:** to monitor the sound quality of video and/or audio recordings
- **Sandiscs:** to be inserted into camera for recording; one is back up, to be used in case of disc failure or disc being full.
 - A 32GB disc can store about 4 hours and 15 minutes of video, with about 8 minutes of video storable per GB. Neither the 32GB nor the 8GB (for audio) should run out during your interview.

You are also encouraged to use your own equipment. A board member would be happy to accompany you if you'd like, but you are also welcome to do this type of interview on your own and then submit copies of the interview in the appropriate format, to be included in the Oral History Project.

Equipment: How to Use It

Before you begin:

Remember to check the **battery power** on your equipment and the memory cards before you set out for your interview!

Practice using the equipment before your interview – your comfort level will affect that of your interviewee.

How to Frame Your Shot:

- Position your interviewee near, but not in front of, at least one window.
 - *Having a window within your shot will “wash out” your interviewee, but drawing the shades on the windows will likely make the atmosphere too dark for a good shot.*
- Allow enough space in the shot for your interviewee to move around a little.
- Some people gesticulate more than others; you want to make sure that, if your interviewee likes to gesticulate, their hands and arms won't get cut out of the shot.
- Try to remove all unnecessary objects from vision. Stray pens or cups on the table, distracting objects that are foregrounded, etc., should be moved out of frame.
- Make sure that your interviewee is comfortable in the position that you've chosen.

For Optimal Sound Quality:

- Record as close to the interviewee as possible
 - *About 4 ft away, maximum.*
- Try to position yourself and all other involved parties as close to equidistant from the camera as is possible.
 - *This will equalize the sound.*
- Test the sound first! Record a snippet, then plug in your headphones and give it a listen.

Please record to MP4 format.

Section 3: How to Conduct an Interview¹

Be sure to seek out not only what they can tell you about the past, but what they can tell you about life in the present. How have certain traditions evolved? What holiday customs are practiced today that weren't a generation ago?

Getting Started:

1. **Set goals:** What do you want to find out? What do you want to focus on?
2. If you're not sure who to interview: **Ask other people!**
 - a. *Some good community sources:* Friends, neighbors, relatives, teachers, librarians, folklorists, and local historians
3. Be sure to get permission from your interviewee in advance. Make it clear how s/he will be recorded (video and/or audio).
 - a. Send the **release form** to the interviewee in advance and make sure that it is completely filled out before you leave.
 - b. A brief biography of the interviewee's life will be a part of the Oral History Exhibit at the Freeman Store. Ask him/her whether they would prefer to provide their own photograph (current or old) or use a screen shot from their interview.
4. Try to locate the interview in a comfortable and quiet place – preferably the home of the interviewee.
 - a. Other good interview spaces might include the workplace of your interviewee, or some sort of community space.
5. Be sure that the interviewee understands the purpose of the interview, and the fate of the recordings, before the interview begins.

¹ Much of this portion of the guide was developed from the Smithsonian Folkways Oral History Guide. To view the original document, visit:

http://www.folklife.si.edu/education_exhibits/resources/guide/introduction.aspx

- a. The recordings will be posted on our blog, our YouTube channel, and in an Oral History Exhibit at the Freeman store. We will also keep a full copy in our master drive, to be made available to researchers on request. We are happy to burn a DVD of the interview to give to the interviewee for personal use.
6. Do your research!
 - a. Be sure to have a comfortable grasp of the person who you're interviewing and the topics that you'll address in the interview.
 - b. Prepare your questions beforehand and bring them to your interview.

Aim for questions that don't prompt a "yes" or "no" answer: How? What? Describe? Expand?
 - c. Know which questions you definitely want to address, but don't let your list of questions constrain the interview. Allow for it to flow as a conversation.
 - d. Try to build on your questions and link them in a logical way, like a story.
 7. Before you begin recording:
 - a. Introduce yourself to the interviewee. Try to establish a rapport and put them at ease. Discuss the purpose of the project and of this specific interview. If possible, silence all phones.
 - b. Test the equipment – record a minute of dialogue in the position that you think you and your interviewee will sit, then play it back through headphones
 - c. Locate your equipment somewhere cool and quiet:

It's best to video-record your interviewee near, but not in front of, a window. Try to turn off loud hums of electronic equipment before you begin.
 - d. Be sure to **check the battery power and equipment memory** beforehand!

During Your Interview:

1. Beginning the interview:
 - a. Start with an easy question that will help your interviewee to relax. 'Where were you born,' 'where did you grow up,' etc.
 - b. Avoid *yes* or *no* questions, especially in the beginning.

Instead, use follow-ups: 'Could you explain, 'Can you give me an example,' or 'How did that happen?'
2. As the interview progresses...
 - a. Be engaged and engaging – smile and nod, keep eye contact.
 - b. **Don't interrupt!** Give a few seconds pause after you think that your interviewee has finished speaking – s/he will need time to consider what they've said or want to say before elaborating.
 - c. Ask for stories and anecdotes whenever possible.
 - d. Use visual materials whenever possible – photographs, heirlooms, etc. will help stimulate conversation.

Photograph these materials and obtain permission to use the photos.
 - e. Glance over your prepared questions as the interview is drawing to a close – make sure that everything you wanted to cover has been covered.
 - f. 1-2 hours is a good amount of time for an interview, but if you sense that your interviewee is getting tired early, stop the interview and schedule the second half for another time.

Sample Interview Questions

The following questions have been used in the Historic Vienna Oral History Project. Including some of these questions in your interview will provide the interviewee's perspectives on common topics.

Consider this to be a skeletal outline. Expand and exclude as you see fit!

Personal Questions:

1. Where were you born?
2. Where did your parents come from?
3. How did you come to Vienna? / What is your connection to the town?
4. How long have you lived here?
5. What is your relationship to town and its buildings?
6. How did you come to have your occupation? How was it different from or similar to your expectations of the work?
7. How has your life been affected by large-scale historical events? (WWI, WWII, Civil Rights...)
8. How was Vienna affected by national events?
9. What was your community's attitude(s) towards what happened? Did those views differ from yours?
10. How is Vienna important to you?
11. What different communities or institutions do you remember being a part of the town?
12. Vienna has grown from a rural, farming community to a commercial extension of Washington, DC. How do you feel the town's identity has altered by these occupation changes?
13. What is your experience with the town's cultural and racial differences?
14. What roles/identities do you find that senior citizens play in the town? What about young adults, middle-aged adults, and children? (eg: children's Halloween parade, commercial business owners...)

Town Related Questions:

1. How do you think Vienna's beginnings compare to its current state? How have the ideologies about or within the town changed?
2. Which buildings do you remember from when you first lived here? Do any still stand today?
3. What sets Vienna apart from surrounding areas? What connects it?
4. What places were important to you throughout your time in Vienna?
5. What stories or legends surrounding the town do you know?

Section 4: Interviewee's Agreement – Release Form and Permissions Letter

In order for Historic Vienna to showcase your oral history on our website and, later, in the ongoing Freeman Store exhibit, we will need full approval for use of the interview recordings that you've made.

Oral History Release Form

Please be sure to print a copy of the *Oral History Release Form*, available on the oral history tab at www.historicviennainc.org and bring it with you.

Fill out the “interviewer” portion of the Agreement before you arrive to the location of the oral history interview; it will make your interviewee more comfortable. **Have the interviewee fill in his/her information and sign where indicated.** Without this signature, we can't publish the interview!

Copyright Permissions Letter

We welcome you to ask your interviewee for approval of the use of supporting materials to enhance the presentation of your oral history presentation.

Examples of useful supporting materials include but are not limited to:

- Representations (photographs, paintings, etc.)
- Ephemera (clothing, toys, utensils, letters, etc.)

You need your interviewee to sign the **Copyright Permissions Letter** *only* if you'd like to use copies of this person's photographs—or photographs of their ephemera—as part of the oral history posted on our website or in the exhibit in the Freeman Store.

The *Copyright Permissions Letter* is available on the oral history tab at www.historicviennainc.org.

Section 5: How to Transcribe Your Interview

Transcriptions are incredibly useful to our project, but they're also incredibly time-consuming; **it takes roughly 4-5 times the length of your interview to transcribe it.**

If you're willing to transcribe:

Transcriptions are simply a line-for-line copy of the dialogue spoken in an interview. Please use a line-break between interviewer and interviewee dialogue. The **format** should look like this:

Title line:

Interview with [Interviewee(s)], on [Month Day, Year]. Interviewer(s): [Name(s)]

Dialogue:

[Speaker's Initials]: [Dialogue]

Sample:

Interview with Jane Doe, on August 1, 2014.

Interviewer: Tom Jones

TJ: Tell us about yourself.

JD: Okay, here goes!

When you've finished transcribing:

Please save the file as a Word document (.doc or .docx) with the same title that you used for the transcription title line.

Section 6: After Your Interview Is Finished

1. Confirm that you have the appropriate release forms filled out and signed and that your interviewee understands what s/he has agreed to.
2. If you'd like, **ask for recommendations for future interviewees.**
3. Once you have recorded your interview, **save it!** Please use MP4 format. Make a DVD copy for your interviewee.
4. Email historicviennava@gmail.com to arrange a time to meet a board member who can transfer your files onto the HVI system and collect the release forms.

Our Mission Statement

Historic Vienna, Inc. (HVI), established by the Vienna Town Council in 1976, is a 501c3 nonprofit corporation dedicated to:

Preserving and promoting knowledge of Vienna's heritage through the identification, preservation, and interpretation of historically significant places, events, and persons.

Educating the public through permanent and revolving exhibits, outreach programs, and publications.

Enhancing a spirit of community through an awareness of Vienna's past.

Our Programs and Activities

- Encourage *preservation of Vienna's history, historic sites, and artifacts* (Freeman Store and Little Library operations, museum exhibits, antiques appraisals, oral histories, preservation award, Vienna's historic register)
- Operate The *Freeman Store* - experience a *historic country store* selling local history books, Virginia crafts, Vienna souvenirs, and old-fashioned toys and candy
- Sponsor *traditional community events* enhancing Vienna's small town atmosphere (e.g., visits with Santa, Church Street Stroll, Walk on the Hill, Easter Egg Roll)
- Present *Living exhibits* that illustrate the way people lived (e.g., reenactments, demonstrations, entertainment)
- Offer *Guided tours* of the Original Vienna Library, Freeman Store and museum exhibits
- Receive *gifts, legacies, and bequests* for on-going preservation and historic activities