

Description of the Oral History Collection at the Zoryan Institute

by

K.M. Greg Sarkissian and George Shirinian

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Future Challenges

- a) Transcription. Even though some of the immediacy and effectiveness of the audio-visual medium would be lost, it would be very handy for researchers to be able to work from written transcripts of the interviews. One of the teachers at the Armenian high school in Toronto has expressed willingness to have his students work on such a project over the years.
- b) Translation. The bulk of the collection, some 78%, is in Armenian, which is of limited accessibility. Translation to English and other languages could open up the use of this collection to others. Richard has indicated that this is a laborious and not inexpensive proposition.
- c) Indexing. There is a rough, hand-written index to the interviews in the dossiers. These could be typed up and put online, either in a word processing file, or an indexed database. If transcriptions and translations are prepared, full-text searching becomes possible. Finally, examples of audio searching exist, and may be applicable to both the English and non-English audio tracks of these interviews.
- d) Sponsoring research and publication. Research grants could be offered to stimulate research and publication, based on the collection.

Where Do We Go From Here?

The survivors are pretty well all gone now, but their legacy lives on for future generations to understand what they went through, what we lost, and what it means to be Armenian. Oral histories provide a direct and immediate link between the world of the survivors and future generations. For the historical, social and ethnographic information they contain, for the deep emotion they often convey, and for the preservation and strengthening of Armenian identity in our youth, these national treasures must be preserved, maintained, and made available as widely as possible. The challenge is how to make this a reality. It will involve a serious commitment of time and finances. For example, it would take thousands of hours of specially trained people to index the keywords in the thousands of hours of interviews. Such a project could last many man-years, but is worth it as an investment in our nation’s future.

We have made our collection open and freely available to researchers, scholars and students who come to the institute for that purpose, where they can be served by our staff in a controlled environment. But in order to realize the full potential of the oral history collections, we at Zoryan are committed to exploring ways in which the collections and the information they contain can be shared among the various educational and research institutions and made more accessible for researchers, educators, film-makers, and others.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that a group of experts be formed, with representation to be determined later, to investigate the complex legal, technical and financial issues involved in dealing with the Armenian oral history collections and make carefully researched recommendations going forward. The ideal result would be that the various collections could be housed in a permanent building, environmentally controlled, secure, with adequate space for storage and use, dedicated staff to ensure the preservation, utilization and dissemination of these materials, with permanent funding. This national

treasure should be controlled by an entity that has the expertise, knowledge and transparency, with a sense of accountability to our nation.