

# Introduction

“Oral history”—a term that has been applied to the research technique of tape-recording spoken reminiscences and transcribing them nearly verbatim into manuscript form—is not a new idea. It was conceived by Allan Nevins, who established the first oral history office at Columbia University in 1948 for the purpose of recording for posterity the recollections of living men and women who have participated in important events or contributed significantly to the social and cultural life of twentieth-century America. During the past two decades this new research genre has gained almost worldwide acceptance, and every year new applications are found for preserving spoken testimony which would otherwise be lost to recorded history. It is estimated that over one hundred agencies devoted to oral history programs are now flourishing in the United States and abroad—ranging from the investigation of a single event to that of epic social movements, from the life of one man to the history of an entire nation.

The Dulles Oral History Project centers on the life of one man and the historical events in which he participated.

In 1959 the Princeton University Library added to its holdings the State and Private Papers of John Foster Dulles, an unprecedented collection of approximately 40,000 documents and 120,000 microfilm copies of material from the official files of the State Department. The possibility of tape-recording the recollections of those who knew and worked with the late Secretary of State seemed to offer an especially appropriate opportunity to supplement this unusual collection. For one thing, extensive and detailed as the Dulles Papers are, there still are gaps, especially concerning the Secretary’s private life and early career. Also, the very size of the formal collection presents problems for the scholar who must sift through tens of thousands of pages of documentation to uncover the significant factors which led to any given decision. The historian’s task can be considerably simplified by those individuals who actually took part in the transactions and are in a position to offer firsthand explanations—or at least knowledgeable hypotheses—concerning the sequence of events and the reasoning that lay behind the ultimate action.

The idea of establishing an oral history collection as an adjunct to the Dulles Papers was first explored in 1963 in conversations between William S. Dix, Princeton University Librarian, and John W. Hanes, Jr., and Roderic L. O’Connor, former assistants to Secretary Dulles, who had been active in the negotiations that led to the presentation of the Papers to Princeton. The idea became a reality a little less than a year later when the Rockefeller Foundation awarded the Princeton University Library a grant (later supplemented by private donations) to launch the Dulles Oral History Project (a list of sponsors is found in Appendix A).

In January 1964 a professional Advisory Committee of historians and former colleagues of Mr. Dulles was named by Princeton’s President Robert F. Goheen (see Appendix B). Chaired by Ambassador Hugh S. Cumming, Jr., the Committee offered suggestions concerning the topics that should be covered in the Project’s program and helped in drawing up a list of the individuals to be invited to participate in interviews.

At the same time, the services of Philip A. Crowl were enlisted to organize and initiate the program of interviews. Dr. Crowl, a former member of Princeton’s Department of History, who had supervised the selection of State Department documents to be included in the Dulles Papers, took a six-month leave from the State Department to accept appointment as the Project’s Director. Between February and August 1964 he drew up the procedures which became the basis for the continuing operation of the Project; conducted the necessary preliminary research, including a detailed chronology of the significant occurrences during Mr. Dulles’s tenure of office as Secretary of State; and launched the interviewing program.

Two basic decisions were reached at the first meeting of the Advisory Committee on March 18, 1964. The first was that the list of individuals to be invited to contribute interviews should encompass as broad a scope as possible, including not only the principal actors in the events in which Mr. Dulles participated but also anyone who might be able to offer significant information of either a

personal or professional nature. To be included were the top officials of the Eisenhower administration, heads of state and foreign ministers, officers of the American and foreign diplomatic corps; members of the Dulles family and their close friends; Mr. Dulles's earlier associates at the Versailles Peace Conference, on Wall Street, on the Federal Council of Churches, in the United Nations, and in Congress; members of the press, his secretaries and staff assistants, classmates, fishing companions, and miscellaneous others.

The second decision was that the number of interviewers should be kept as small as possible. Because of the specialized nature of the Project, it was thought that only by keeping its activities within a small, close-knit working group could continuity and depth be achieved in the content of interviews. It was realized, furthermore, that skill in the technique of interviewing would be acquired only by experience and that only by restricting the number of interviewers would any of them develop the necessary skill. As a result nearly ninety percent of the interviews were conducted by Dr. Crowl and Richard D. Challener, Professor of History at Princeton and member of the Project's Advisory Committee (a complete list of project personnel is found in Appendix C).

Almost immediately invitations to contribute interviews were issued to a preliminary list of 143 men and women. The actual interviewing program was formally launched toward the end of April 1964. Through the spring and summer of that year, Dr. Crowl traveled in Europe and across the United States with his tape recorder. His interviews were primarily with Secretary Dulles's associates in the State Department, United States Ambassadors, foreign statesmen, and the Dulles family and friends. After his six-month leave from the State Department expired, he continued to conduct interviews in Washington, where a majority of the prospective interviewees resided.

Professor Challener was responsible largely for Mr. Dulles's Wall Street colleagues, churchmen, members of Congress, the military and other government officials, and members of the press. Most of his interviewing activities centered in New York City, but while on leave during the academic year 1965-66, he was able to make frequent trips to Washington and several longer excursions to Canada, New England, the South and Midwest, and Texas. It was apparent from the start, however, that it would be a physical, if not financial, impossibility for Dr. Crowl and Professor Challener to reach all of Mr. Dulles's associates, scattered as they were from Algeria to New Zealand. Fortunately, several opportunities presented themselves.

Spencer Davis, of United Press International, a specialist in Asian affairs, was preparing an extensive tour of the Far East and agreed to conduct interviews in that area for the Project. When he returned to the United States in October 1964, he brought with him the recorded testimony of twenty-one leading statesmen. Professor Gordon A. Craig, of Stanford University, who spent the summers of 1964 and 1966 in Europe, taped eight interviews with European and American diplomats while abroad, as well as three in California. Louis L. Gerson, Professor of Political Science at the University of Connecticut, also agreed to conduct four interviews for the Project during his travels in Israel and India; Bayly Winder, then Professor of Oriental Studies at Princeton, added two more interviews during a trip to Lebanon; Loftus Becker, former Legal Adviser in the State Department, interviewed one French statesman in Paris; and Gerard C. Smith, of the Atlantic Council, substituted for Dr. Crowl in Washington while the latter was overseas. All in all, at the conclusion of the Project, the interviewers had traveled to seventeen foreign countries and sixteen states across the nation, including the District of Columbia, and taped 315 hours of testimony from 285 men and women.

After Dr. Crowl's return to the State Department in September 1964, he served as Special Consultant and remained in close touch with the Project's offices by telephone and periodic trips to Princeton. The day-to-day activities of the Project's offices were turned over to an Executive Secretary, Mrs. Bertie Miller. To her fell the multitudinous administrative and logistical arrangements so essential to the success of the enterprise—scheduling and rescheduling interviews, supervising the transcription of the oral testimony from tape to typescript, recording the changes in the transcripts requested by the interviewees, negotiating with the interviewees on final terms of access, and conducting all office correspondence. Regular transcribers were also added to the staff, and the long process of putting the taped testimony into written form began in full force. The first transcript was approved and formally entered into the collection in November 1964. By the close of the Project, the

collection consisted of 11,800 typed pages of testimony with individual transcripts varying in length from 7 to 249 pages.

As the work of the Project progressed, the list of possible contributors continued to grow. Before the Project closed, almost 450 men and women were invited to contribute interviews. There were, of course, disappointments—conflicting schedules, ill health, inaccessibility—which made it impossible to complete all the interviews planned. There were also those who declined to be interviewed, although the majority of these did so because they believed that their recollections were too vague or too peripheral to be of any real value to the Project. The taping of such interviews was not pressed, for naturally the interest of the Project was in quality, not quantity.

For the most part there was very encouraging interest on the part of Mr. Dulles's associates to contribute what information they could. Over eighty-five percent of those contacted expressed immediate willingness to be interviewed, and not a few diplomats and statesmen from overseas, whom it would otherwise have been impossible to interview, made special arrangements to meet with either Dr. Crowl or Professor Challenger while on brief visits to the United States. In addition, at least two score of the interviewees supplemented their transcripts with personal records, correspondence, and even photographs.

Researchers will be pleased to learn (as the list of transcripts beginning on page 1 indicates) that almost all the participants in the Project have been very liberal concerning the use to be made of their transcripts. Only about twenty of the transcripts are temporarily closed or require special permission to read. Most transcripts have no restrictions whatever, and the remainder may be consulted immediately, with varying restrictions concerning citation and reproduction of texts.

Finally, special mention should be made of the Project's Sponsors. Without the interest and support of the Rockefeller Foundation, Mr. Herbert Hoover, Jr., Mr. John W. Hanes, Jr., and the many other men, women and organizations who gave so generously to the Princeton University Library, the Dulles Oral History Collection would never have become a reality.