

About Fieldwork: Solebury Stories

A Three-Session Workshop for Collectors of Oral History and Folklife

Several years ago STHS developed a list of residents who we were told might be interested in being interviewed about their lives and times here in Solebury Township. Although several interviews have been done, most of the list has been pretty much collecting dust. There does seem to be a recent uptick in people who are wondering about how to collect community oral history, local legends, and stories from friends, neighbors, and family. "What to ask?" seems to be the question of the day on the interviewer end of things. There is a set of general questions available on our website (www.soleburyhistory.org) but it is embedded on pages 22 through 27 in the linked booklet *Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide*. The STHS website now has a link directly to those pages, courtesy of the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (www.folklife.si.edu). But be forewarned! These are very general questions, and only work well for introductory discussion as the interviewer and interviewee establish a working relationship. So before you bob on into the field waving that list of general questions and your recording device (yes, you need a recording device of some sort!) at would-be interviewees on *any* subject it is a good idea to have a specific project with a focused plan for success in your hand as well.

The Oral History Committee is currently taking that aforementioned list of would-be interviewees and revising it into an Oral History Survey Collection Plan that will allow the STHS to learn about Solebury Township's "everyday" history and life experiences from the folks who live it. The Committee is two people, and we can't do this project all by ourselves, so we need help from folks who are interested in meeting other folks in our community to discuss our community from that "everyday point of view."

To help all of us get on the same page the Committee is offering a three-session workshop from 2-4 pm on Sundays, April 23, April 30, and May 7 called ***About Fieldwork***. The workshop will be held at the Old Solebury Schoolhouse, 3020 Sungan Road, in the village of Solebury. For reference and to stimulate discussion we will be using the *Smithsonian Folklife and Oral History Interviewing Guide* and *Folklife & Fieldwork: An Introduction to Cultural Documentation*, a publication of the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress. Both organizations are staffed by professionals from many scholarly cultural disciplines who are renown internationally for their work with the individuals and groups, ethnic and otherwise, who have contributed so much to American culture as it emerges from past into present.

Session 1 on April 23 will introduce you to the process of fieldwork including definitions, project development, recording equipment, professional ethics, and planning your interview(s). We will be planning projects as a group, and you will have the opportunity to develop your own project (e.g., a series of

interviews with your grandmother regarding her time in the military) or choose to develop interviews that fit the STHS Oral History Community Survey.

Session 2 on April 30 will help you prepare for your first field experience. We will discuss pre-field research, the fine art of taking field notes, developing your list of questions, interview techniques, forms you need to use for legal protection both interviewer and interviewee, and any other questions you may have. If you have your own project, great! If not, we'll match you up with one of our potential interviewees. And then we turn you loose into the field!

Session 3 on May 7 will give all of us an opportunity to discuss our experiences in the field, and how and where to preserve your field efforts either personally or in our archives, or even elsewhere.

So, if you are interested in everyday history and culture, curious about your community, like to talk to folks about their life experiences, and want to contribute something to our local, state, and even national understanding of ourselves *About Fieldwork: A Three Session Workshop* is the place to start. Bring a friend or two if you like, even a friend or two from another local history association.

Questions or to register: e-mail oralhistory@soleburyhistory.org.

Free to STHS members. You will receive printed copies of both the Smithsonian and the American Folklife Center booklets at the workshop.

We are asking non-members for a \$15.00 fee to cover copying and general expenses for the three sessions.

Solebury Schoolhouse 3020 Sagan Road