

# London Oral History Project

## **The Project:**

The London Oral History Project will produce an oral history of London, Ontario presenting voices and personal histories drawn from each of London's 14 Wards. The model for this project is the oral history work of the late Studs Terkel, a journalist and broadcaster whose books *Working*, *Division Street America*, *Hard Times*, and *The Good War* broke new ground in the study of democratic, urban, and community life and history in the United States.

## **Mission:**

To offer a compelling, in-depth account of the diverse identities and lived experiences of London residents and to present to Londoners and the broader reading public a narrative account of what life in our city is like.

## **Method:**

The principle task of this project is to collect narrative. Each Ward will be assigned a team of 2 Researchers tasked with interviewing a minimum of 5-10 households. Note: 'household' can mean any individual or family living in a single-family home, town home, apartment, shelter or on the street. The wider the selection of 'households' the better.

Researchers will be responsible for reaching out to persons and families from all walks of life and religious, ethnic, gender, and racial backgrounds. *All stories matter*. Researchers will also be encouraged to allow their subjects to decide on the topics to be discussed.

Interviews will be arranged by the Research Team in conjunction with the interviewee. There is no designated time limit for the interviews.

## **Story Collection Period:**

The 'Story Collection Period' will be determined by the teams at the first strategy meeting. Note: the summer months may prove the best time for setting up interviews.

## **Equipment:**

Interviews will be recorded on audio equipment. Several options include:

Audacity (requires a laptop)  
Garageband (requires a laptop)  
Hand held tape recorders  
iPhones & Android phones

All interviews need to be recorded on reliable equipment. Once the recordings have been made they need to be made available for transcription.

## **Transcription:**

When the interviews are collected they will be transferred into text format, preferably through a transcription programme. A discussion will occur between the Research Team, the Editorial Staff, and the Project Managers as to how much editing will be required.

The purpose of this project is to allow Londoners to speak in their own voices which should lead to *minimal* editorial adjustments to the interview transcripts.

## **Waivers:**

Interviewees will sign waivers granting permission for their stories to be recorded and transcribed for publication.

## **Anticipated Staff:**

28 Researchers: 2 per Ward  
14 Editors: 1 per Ward  
1 Assistant Project Manager  
1 Project Manager  
1 Historical Consultant

This project will require a minimum of 28 young adults who will fan out in teams of two across London's 14 Wards. Research teams should be composed of residents who live in their assigned Ward and have personal connections with the community.

The 14 member Editorial Staff will be responsible for interview transcription and the placement of interviews within the book manuscript. Editors should represent the Ward they will be editing.

After the interviews have been completed, editorial discussions will occur between the Research Teams and the Editors as to how much interview material will make the final edit of the book. The Project Manager and Assistant will sit in on these meetings.

## **Product:**

The London Oral History Project will produce a book length manuscript that will be pitched to various academic and popular presses for publication. The goal will be to make the book available to the Canadian book buying public.

The book will also be presented to both London City Council and the London Library as a document of the social, cultural, economic, and personal life of our city. This book will be a resource for London officials, social scientists, artists, and the general reading public who want to learn more about the living dynamics of London, Ontario.

## **Benefits for Participants:**

The benefits for project participants are manifold.

### **1.) Community Involvement:**

The Project Manager will inquire with the Thames Valley Public School District as to whether participation in the project can be counted towards fulfillment of the school district's 'Community Involvement' requirement.

### **2.) Authorship:**

All participants will be given co-authorship and editorial credits when the study is published.

### **3.) Civic & Field Experience:**

This project is an unusual opportunity to learn about London's many neighbourhoods and communities in-depth and will offer researchers a unique opportunity to do field work and learn firsthand about the workings of their city. This is not only a special volunteer opportunity, it is a civic experiment.

### **4.) Cutting Edge Work Experience:**

The London Oral History Project will provide staff with valuable work experience and the chance to contribute to a unique project that has never before been attempted in Canada.

## **Who we are looking for:**

The London Oral History Project is looking for young adults who are good at asking questions, are careful and attentive listeners, and who are willing to devote hours of their time to reaching out to, and conversing with, members of their community. We want researchers who have a sense of purpose, specifically a commitment to the mission of documenting the varied life of their city and presenting it to the broader community and to the world. This should be a labour of love.

## **Funding:**

The Project Manager and Assistant Project Manager will be responsible for reaching out to the non-profit community in London, the Trillium Foundation, and to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SHRC) to secure grant money for the project. They will also be responsible for community fundraising. A budget will be prepared with input from the Research Team and Editorial Staff. The Project Manager and Assistant will work with the Historical Consultant to seek any available avenues for funding.

## **Our Goal:**

To produce a pathbreaking study of the social, economic, cultural, ecological and demographic life of London, Ontario. *This project will produce the first ever youth-led oral history of a major Canadian city.* Furthermore, this will be a project led by youth to introduce them to the historical depth, sociological complexity, and social and political possibilities embedded in their communities and in the city-at-large. The work they produce will go a long way toward revealing the many currents of life in this vibrant city and raise broader awareness of the possibilities of life in the modern Canadian urban community. It is our hope that this book will provide a platform to people and neighbourhoods that are not always heard.

## **Why?**

All too often it is said that Canadians do not know their neighbours or talk to people whose social, political, and religious views differ from their own. Often hard working people who put in long hours at their jobs are left turning to social media to reestablish a sense of community. While this is not in itself a bad thing, it is often cited as one major reason why neighbours do not know one another and many streets are quiet and lack pavement life.

This project is an attempt to help Londoners learn (or relearn) who their neighbours are; to aid them in their understanding of the aspirations of diverse and divergent communities; to make visible people who often go unseen; and to engage city residents with the stories that shape the social geography of their city.