

MEDIA PRESENTATIONS

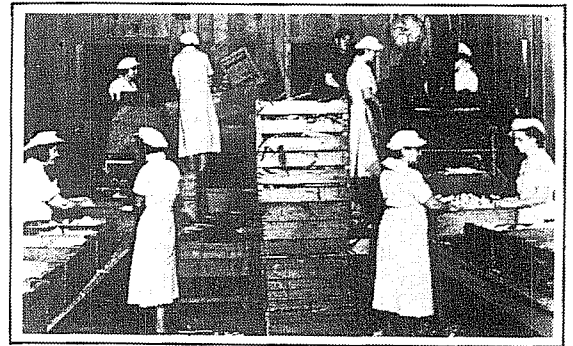
Kathryn Anderson -- University of Western Washington

Dennis Duffy -- free-lance writer and multi-media producer

"Tape/Slide Show--Women's Heritage"

by Kathryn Anderson

Kathryn Anderson presented the tape/slide show of the Washington Women's Heritage Project then discussed various features of the presentation. This was followed by lively audience discussion. It was not possible to adequately record this discussion so no transcript is available.



Courtesy of the Washington State Historical Society, Tacoma



Courtesy of WSU Libraries, Pullman



Courtesy of the Whatcom Museum Archives

"Video Tapes as an Oral History Medium"

by Dennis Duffy

I think there is a large potential audience for local history programs on video tape through the cable systems. Basically speaking, cable systems in Canada when they reach a certain size, are required to put in studio facilities and provide so many hours of community programs per week. I think that is like a built-in audience because it tends to attract people who want alternate programs and who are interested in their own communities. The systems are required to provide local program origination and community access, and some of them also offer workshops in use of the video equipment and various aspects of program production. So oral history interviews seem to be an excellent form of community programming because they introduce viewers to their own surroundings and their own heritage. Of course, the big advantage in using video tapes over films is, it does reduce production costs because its tape is reusable. You don't have to buy film.

Of course though, some things will work on video and some won't. With the wrong interviewee you can end up with an interview which looks like talking heads, I don't mean the group. Video can be really intimidating to the interviewee and you can end up with an interview that is less effective than an oral interview because he or she will not loosen up. However, with the right subject, you can record many further dimensions and subtle nuances of what is going on. There is the interviewee's face and expressions, mannerisms and gestures. Even dress can tell a lot about the person. If the recording is made at the subject's home, you can use the camera to explore the space and look and momentos, things hanging on the

walls and stuff like that, and give a sense of the person's environment. And the interviewee may wish to illustrate a point through a physical action or to demonstrate some kind of craft and technique, and those are really suitable for video. One thing that is also very valuable (it's very irritating in an oral interview) is when somebody says "Oh, that's him in the photograph," and you cannot see it, whereas in video technique you just hold up the picture to the camera.

The newer generation of video equipment are very portable and relatively simple to operate. You can usually get the basics of operating this kind of equipment within an hour. The new cameras have increasing sensitivity that enables them to give exceptional picture quality under ordinary room light. However they generally recommend the use of TV lights to get quality pictures for broadcasting. The format almost universally used by community cable operators in Canada is 3/4 inch video cassette. This format provides a greater picture stability than the half inch cassette format, known as VHS. The editing technology for 3/4 has now been brought up to professional standards because it is now being used for television news work. Some community stations have computerized editing systems. Very simply computerized, but it really speeds up the process. Also the availability of two audio channels on 3/4 inches is a real advantage because you can mike the interviewee and interviewer separately. From the oral history viewpoint, the main drawback of the 3/4 inch video gear is that the portable deck accepts only 20 minute cassettes. They are smaller than the studio decks which will take up to an hour long 3/4 inch tape, whereas the portable will not. So you constantly have to unload and reload for shooting on location. You can, if you are in the studio, of course, and that will give you more control over the interview situation, using the studio deck. But I think it very definitely

creates a much more sterile and artificial recording. My personal preference is always to record where the subject is most comfortable and to accept whatever minor technical limitations arise.

The completed recording can be used in a variety of ways, in its raw, unedited form such as the material in the Archives-(they always keep the raw form as well as the edited final products). If the material is sufficiently interesting and compactly organized, it can be televised more or less the way you shoot it. The soundtrack can be transferred to audio tape and then transcribed for reference to the verbal content. Additional visual material can be edited in. All the material can be edited down to a program dealing with a particular theme or aspect of the subject.

The tape I am playing today will show excerpts from a [video] pilot project that was produced by our oral history program in 1978. It was in cooperation with the communications program at Camosun College in Victoria which provided the video equipment. Myself and 2 other Camosun students comprised the technical crew. The subject of the project was Robert Strachan who was the head of the CCF and the NDP, who led the Opposition in the B.C. Legislature from 1956 to 1969. From 1972-1975 he was a cabinet minister in the first and, regrettably, only NDP government of B.C. Mr. Strachan was scheduled to be interviewed anyway by the program as part of the ongoing effort there to document the political history of the province, and it was felt that he would be a good subject for video as well. The interview was researched and carried out by Derek Reimer and David Mitchell. Three hours of video tape were recorded in Mr. Strachan's home at Cedar which is near Nanaimo, and 2 hours were recorded in the Provincial Legislature. We also shot a few scenes outside of Mr. Strachan's home, and we later transferred a number of photographs in newspaper headlines to videotape. We used all this to prepare an hour long document which was

entitled "Robert Strachan--Journeyman Politician." It's biographical in format and uses elements of all 5 hours of interviews. Narration is used to hold the program together, and it is organized visually by displays and headlines which also is very practical for it is covering up the edits which it is supposed to do. There were some technical problems which is why the program has never been telecast except by the Nanaimo Tribune after Mr. Strachan's death. Since the oral interview was transcribed, we had the transcripts to refer to, as the program was very much sped up, and we could find very quickly any particular sentence or phrase. But we were using manual editing with stop watches and having to start both sections simultaneously. It was very primitive. (I am glad to say that technology advanced considerably since then.)

Mr. Strachan was an excellent subject. He had a pleasant disposition, a very well modulated voice, he was very animated and expressive in his gestures, and most importantly, I think, he was very casual and relaxed on camera, probably as a result of being interviewed continuously for about 20 years on television during his political career. I think that shows. He was just not conscious of the camera being there. I think these qualities will be evident in the first excerpt in which Mr. Strachan has been discussing a typical debate in the B.C. Legislature at the time that Arnold Webster was leader of the Opposition.

Perhaps some future person could benefit from the following: The newspaper headlines were shot in black and white for technical reasons because of the place where they had been shot. And the editing together of black and white and color material just does not work because black and white lacks some of the signals that color has. So you get picture break-up. So here we are using these pictures to cover up edit, and it is creating a worse problem than we would have had by leaving the material

alone. Also a very sophisticated editing could not be had at the time. It was very difficult to edit with the position we would have liked, and so we might cut out the first word in the sentence inadvertently. However those are problems of production. There is no cause for you to worry about video tape, and some day I would like to go back and do it again and do it right. The final excerpt I am going to play is in the conclusion of the program where Mr.

Strachan discusses his retirement. His voice is as a sort of voice-over the segment which we shot at the Nanaimo River outside of the house. The juxtaposition of these separate audio and video recordings in the one segment is particularly effective and rather pointed as well. As I see the interview again, it is very hard for me to believe that he is dead.