

2021-22 Oral History Project Overview



Alpha Chi's 100th Anniversary. Former Alpha Chi National Council President Dr. Robert Sledge's noteworthy *Scholarship and Character* details Alpha Chi's story through its 75th anniversary. For the honor society's 100th anniversary, the National Council wants to enhance and update his work with scores of personal stories captured in oral history interviews of students, faculty, staff, and friends involved with Alpha Chi, past and present. Recorded, transcribed, archived, and catalogued, these interviews will provide an exciting collective history of Alpha Chi for current members and future historians.

While every chapter deserves its own oral history, we propose to start off by making a big impact with a narrow plan. There are people without whom, Alpha Chi would not have been able to impact so many lives. Many of those people are still with us and represent a period of growth through change. They have helped the organization weather storms and prosper. No oral history of Alpha Chi would be complete without their stories, and we want to gather them first.

Why Oral History? Oral history is the collecting of information about people and past events through recorded interviews with individuals who knew the people and participated in the events. Its objective is to capture memories, observations, and interpretations that may not be found in written sources. Through oral history, everyone gets to have a say, not just the leaders. By recording the memories of a variety of people, oral history preserves divergent points of view and captures ideas and activities that would otherwise be lost forever. In addition, it makes a permanent archival record of people's voices and images.

Oral Histories of Local Chapters. Alpha Chi lives in its hundreds of chapters, so every chapter deserves its own oral history. Members, sponsors, alumni, and former sponsors can describe their experiences at gatherings, service projects, and conventions. What did they do in Alpha Chi, how did Alpha Chi affect them, and what are they doing now? The more interviews a chapter records, the richer will its story be. These oral histories not only will be placed in Alpha Chi's National Archives but also in each chapter's college or university archives, thus becoming a local service project while simultaneously contributing to Alpha Chi's collective history.

Oral Histories of Regions, Conventions, National Leaders/Staff, and Projects. Some of the interviews of chapter members will inevitably talk about regional and national activities and conventions, and a systematic effort will be made to record the histories of regions, conventions, leaders, and projects. Regions formerly held their own separate biennial conventions, and these will be recorded for posterity as well. National conventions have always been an exciting part of the life of Alpha Chi, and some sponsors and retired leaders can remember conventions from three or four decades ago. These memories need to be recorded.

Alpha Chi celebrates many important leaders with named scholarships, and oral history will help keep their good deeds alive. Some of these leaders are still around and should be interviewed while they are willing and able. Interviews should also seek to trace changes in the constitution and bylaws, the creation and development of projects and services, and the expansion of the society. Collectively, the chapter interviews and these oral histories will compose the oral history of Alpha Chi.

Conducting Oral History. Every Alpha Chi member and sponsor has the tools, skills, and ability to conduct oral history, so the oral history of Alpha Chi will be the joint effort of the entire honor society. Oral history's basic tool is a cellphone or tablet. The needed skill is good conversation, and the necessary ability is intelligence, qualities that are the heart of Alpha Chi.

With leadership and guidelines from Alpha Chi's National Council, the oral histories of chapters (and former chapters), regions, conventions, and leaders (and emeritus leaders) will be collected concurrently, independently, and at each individual pace by scores of Alpha Chi members and sponsors across the society.

Creating Alpha Chi Documentaries. Oral histories are primary sources. Written histories of chapters, regionals, and the national society can be written from them. More compelling and immediate, documentaries can be made from them as well. Just as every member and sponsor of Alpha Chi has the tools and skills to record oral history, so nearly everybody has the tools and skills to create documentaries.

The iMovie and Moviemaker programs built into Macintosh computers and PCs allow users to cut, crop, arrange, modify, and enhance recorded interviews. Photographs, sound, and special effects can be added and adjusted. Voice-overs can be recorded. Nearly all the basic tools used by professional documentarians are available for Alpha Chi members to use.

Examples of documentaries created at California Theta (but telling the University of La Verne's story, not the Alpha Chi chapter's) can be viewed at <http://laverne.libguides.com/oralhistory>. Former National Council Member Al Clark describes the process in his article, "Oral History as Institutional Biography," *The Public Historian*, Vo. 41, No. 3, pp. 72-90 (August 2019).

Guidelines and Consent Forms. Oral history is best conducted as a conversation between interviewer and interviewee. Conversation may flow naturally after the opening, "What did you do in Alpha Chi?" However, if needed, the guidelines provide give sample questions to start and keep the conversation going. Every interview needs to start with the interviewer stating the name of the person interviewed, the interviewee's relationship to the society, and the date, time, and place of the interview.

Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, 82 FR 7149, clarifies that IRB approval is not required for oral history. The recommended Informed Consent & Deed of Gift forms outline the process and explain how the interview will be archived and used. Recorded interviews and their transcriptions will be permanently placed in Alpha Chi's official archives, but interviewers should also deposit copies of these forms in the archives of their college or university as well, providing Alpha Chi more visibility and contributing to general knowledge.

Alpha Chi's Oral History Lives. Although the stimulus for Alpha Chi's oral history is the centennial in 2022, we hope Alpha Chi chapters will want to continue collecting oral histories as part of their regular activities. These interviews, too, should be archived in Alpha Chi's national archive as well as in the archives of the chapter's home institution, contributing to the rich, evolving history of the society.

Oral History Service Project. With the skills learned through the Alpha Chi Oral History Project, chapter members might want to provide service by developing an oral history project for their college or university. Such projects might begin with interviews of past and present presidents, deans, and prominent faculty, but students, staff, alumni, and emeriti should also be included.

Associated Documents and Aids:

- *Guidelines for Conducting Interviews*
- *Informed Consent & Deed of Gift Form*
- [Zoom recording instructions](#) visual (video version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZHSAMd89JE>)
- Using YouTube to help create transcripts: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyLA5sMqyr8>