Legal Release

Frequently Asked Questions

The Oregon Historical Society requires that all oral histories entering its collections be accompanied by a signed legal release. This is standard practice in the oral history field.

What is a Legal Release?

A legal release is a document signed by all parties who contribute to the creation of an oral history. This usually consists of an interviewer and an interviewee. This document serves as a clear statement of copyright, and ensures that the oral history that all parties worked to produce will become a valuable and accessible part of the historical record.

How will OHS use my oral history?

Once the legal release has been signed and the oral history is integrated into its collections, OHS will assigned a Creative Commons license to the interview and its derivatives (i.e. transcript).

This Creative Commons license will be: Creative Commons - Attribution, Non-Commercial, ShareAlike (BY-NC-SA) http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/ will allow open access and free use of the oral history to the public, for everything short of commercial use.

OHS will make the oral history available to the public onsite at its downtown research library and online on its Digital Collections website, https://digitalcollections.ohs.org/. OHS will also create copies of the oral history for preservation and access purposes.

OHS will hold, preserve and provide access to the oral history and its derivatives in perpetuity.

What rights will I retain?

A common concern for interviewees is that once they sign a legal release giving copyright to OHS, they will no longer own their story.
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OHS will only own the copyright to the recording specified on the legal release document and its derivatives. The ideas expressed by an interviewee and their stories are still wholly the interviewee’s property.

Additionally, the legal release form specifically states that the interviewee retains a non-exclusive license to the oral history during their lifetime. This means that the interviewee retains the ability to use the specified recording as they see fit. However, they no longer retain the right to transfer copyright to any other party.

Some interviewees have expressed a wish to extend this non-exclusive license to other parties, usually a spouse or close relative. OHS is willing to discuss these matters with interviewees and make reasonable adjustments to our legal release form at the time of signing.

What if I don’t want my oral history made public?

Occasionally, after an interview is completed, interviewees can find themselves regretting some of the things they discussed. When this happens, interviewees often no longer want their interview to become available to the public.

While OHS will not agree to hold and preserve oral histories that it cannot make accessible, OHS is willing to discuss reasonable restrictions or redactions.

What if I have a question that this FAQ doesn’t answer?

If an interviewee has any concerns about the legal release form and their rights that is not addressed or fully answered here, please contact the OHS Oral History Librarian:

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