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U of L's Centre for Oral History and Tradition to offer public workshops

Oral history projects help bring the past to life through the voices of people who lived at the time. Members of the University of Lethbridge's Centre for Oral History and Tradition (COHT), in partnership with the Galt Museum and Archives, are offering their expertise as oral historians to help southern Albertans make their projects a reality.

"There's definitely more and more interest in oral history in Alberta these days," says Dr. Jenna Bailey, COHT senior research fellow. "People realize it's a wonderful way to collect local history and many museums and community organizations are doing oral history projects."

"Oral histories are found in many archives and the Galt Archives is no exception. They are valuable historical sources as much as letters, diaries and official documents," says Andrew Chernevych, the Galt Museum's archivist. "Oral histories help preserve experiences of people who don't commit their memories to writing; this is perhaps the only way to capture some unique aspects of history."

Oral history projects often involve collaboration amongst the generations. As people in a community get older, younger generations may realize that much local history resides in people's memories, especially in rural areas. Oral history projects provide a way for that knowledge to be preserved.

"In an era of so much electronic communication and ever-changing technology, we must consciously record and preserve aspects of our history," says Dr. Heidi MacDonald, history professor and director of COHT. "Oral histories, preserved in archives, will be a wonderful source for future generations of family and professional historians."

Oral history is an intimate way of capturing the history of a place as well as the diverse histories of individual lives. Engaging stories are the result and those who offer up their own history often enjoy the opportunity to share their lives as part of a wider history.

“For organizations or individuals who recognize the importance of the history of an area but don’t necessarily have a huge budget or team, oral history interviews are an accessible way to capture history,” says Bailey.

Workshop participants will learn how to plan an oral history project from the ground up, including what kind of recording device to use, what questions to ask and obtaining consent.

The COHT and the Galt Museum & Archives are delivering the workshops with several co-partners — the Crowsnest Community Library, the Crowsnest Museum & Archives, Stavely and District Museum, Claresholm & District Museum, and the Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre in Medicine Hat — who are hosting the individual sessions. Beginner workshops are scheduled for May 27 at the Galt Museum, June 10 at the Crowsnest Community Library, June 11 at the Stavely & District Museum and September 23 at the Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre in Medicine Hat. An intermediate workshop is scheduled for October 21 at the Galt Museum & Archives.

The keynote speaker for the workshops is Kimberly Lyall, project manager for the Governor General’s Award-winning Coyote Flats Oral History Project. She’ll share her experiences and offer tips for carrying out an oral history project. Other workshop presenters are trained oral historians.

The cost is \$70 plus GST for adults and \$25 plus GST for seniors and students. To register for the May 27 workshop, call 403-320-3954 or 1-866-320-3898, ext. 0 by May 20. For the June 10 workshop in the Crowsnest Pass, call 403-563-5434 by June 3. For the June 11 workshop in Stavely, call 403-549-0189 or send an email to jmbmab@gmail.com by June 4. For the Sept. 23 workshop in Medicine Hat, call 403-502-8777 by Sept. 16. The deadline for registration for the intermediate workshop at the Galt is Oct. 14.

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