

GOLDEN DAYS: EXPLORING THE HISTORY AND HERITAGE OF FAMILIES IN UPPER EAST TENNESSEE  
prepared by Dr. Richard Blaustein and Joan Moser, Dept. of Sociology/Anthropology,  
ETSU, Johnson City, TN 37614

HINTS TO COLLECTORS OF FAMILY FOLKLORE AND HISTORY

1. How do I go about collecting family history and folklore?

The first thing to do is to find someone willing to be interviewed and then arrange a time to sit down with them and talk about their memories of the old days.

2. Who should I interview?

- a. grandparents, or relatives of their generation.
- b. older neighbors.
- c. parents.
- d. older people with interesting hobbies or backgrounds.

Every family, whether its roots are in city or country life, has its own history and traditions. It's best to start collecting family history and folklore from grandparents, great-aunts and uncles, etc., but if these people are not around, you may be surprised by the information you can gather from your parents, or relatives and neighbors of their age group. If you can't involve family members in this project, older neighbors might be willing to help you out. Generally speaking, it's best to interview someone with whom you are familiar.

3. How should I set up my interview?

- a. make an appointment with the person at a definite time. You want to be sure that the time you pick is convenient for both of you and does not interfere with work, meals, church, etc.
- b. make sure you have enough time to complete your interview. It takes time to get warmed up, and it will probably take at least an hour to ask all the questions on the interview guide. You may need to set up more than one visit.
- c. make sure that you set up your interview in a quiet place where you won't be disturbed by traffic noise, people running in and out, TV, etc. This is especially important if you are planning to record the interview.

4. What will the interview itself involve?

- a. explain to the person(s) you are going to interview that you are interested in learning about their family background and some of the pastimes, customs and crafts they remember from their youth.

- b. write down the information you collect in the interview guide. Some of the questions only need short, simple answers, such as those concerning names, birthplaces, numbers of brothers and sisters, etc. Other questions may call for long detailed answers, which you will want to take down in a notebook or record with a tape recorder.
  - c. try to get detailed answers to questions: for example, if you ask your grandmother if her mother ever made home remedies and she says "yes", you'll want to ask her what they were like, how they were made, what they were supposed to do, etc. If the person says they played a certain game in childhood, such as "Hide and Seek", "Gaint Steps" or "Red Rover", have them describe its rules.
  - d. in talking about family history, ask the person you are interviewing to show you their family album or photograph collection. This can help them to remember people and events more clearly. Also, pictures of parties, picnics, weddings, etc. can be valuable in asking questions about customs connected with special family events.
  - e. ask to see any family heirlooms, such as old quilts, embroidery, musical instruments, furniture, tools, etc.
  - f. to illustrate your report, you might take photographs of the person, their home, family heirlooms, etc.
5. What do I do with my interview material once I have collected it?
- Use the information you have gathered to prepare a report. Give as much general information concerning family background as possible. If one particular area, such as story-telling, crafts or cooking, stands out in your interview, concentrate on it. If the person tells you a joke or story or sings you a song, try to use their exact words. Again, using a tape recorder to record the interview can be a great help.
6. Some general hints:
- a. Pick a person to interview that you feel comfortable with, who is not nervous, and who speaks clearly.
  - b. don't try to rush through the interview. Relax and enjoy yourself.
7. We urge you to deposit copies of your family history and folklore collections with the Archives of Appalachia, Sherrod Library, ETSU, Johnson City, Tenn. 37614. This will ensure that your work is preserved and will also contribute to our knowledge of our region's history and heritage. (Please include your signature and that of your interview subject on the attached Interview Release Form)

GOLDEN DAYS: EXPLORING THE HISTORY AND HERITAGE OF  
FAMILIES IN UPPER EAST TENNESSEE

Interview Guide

I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. What is your full name? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What else are you called? (nickname) \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where do you live? (address) \_\_\_\_\_  
(street or route)

\_\_\_\_\_ (town) \_\_\_\_\_ (state) \_\_\_\_\_ (zip)

4. Your telephone number (if any)? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you ever lived anywhere else? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, please list the places where you have lived.

Place

Year

6. Have you ever traveled anywhere? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, where?

Place

Year

7. Where were you born? \_\_\_\_\_  
(town) \_\_\_\_\_ (county)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
(state) \_\_\_\_\_ (nation)

8. Date of birth? \_\_\_\_\_  
(day) \_\_\_\_\_ (month) \_\_\_\_\_ (year)

9. Are you married? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, what is your husband's (or wife's) name?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you have any children? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, please list their names and birth dates.

Name

Birth date

11. What kind of work do/did you do? \_\_\_\_\_

12. What kind of work do/did your spouse do? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. Are you a member of any clubs, organizations, or churches? If so, list them. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

14. What was the highest grade that you completed in school? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any academic degrees? (B.A., M.A., Ph.D., etc.) \_\_\_\_\_

15. Do you have any brothers or sisters? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, list them \_\_\_\_\_

Name

Address

16. What is your father's name? \_\_\_\_\_

17. Where was he born? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Place) (date)  
What kind of work does/did he do? \_\_\_\_\_
18. What is your mother's name? \_\_\_\_\_
19. Where was she born? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Place) (date)  
What kind of work did/does she do? \_\_\_\_\_
20. What is your mother's mother's name (grandmother)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Where was she born? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Place) (date)  
What kind of work does/did she do? \_\_\_\_\_
21. What is your mother's father's name (grandfather)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Where was he born? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Place) (date)  
What kind of work does/did he do? \_\_\_\_\_
22. What is your father's mother's name (grandmother)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Where was she born? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Place) (date)  
What kind of work does/did she do? \_\_\_\_\_
23. What is your father's father's name (grandfather)?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Where was he born? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Place) (date)  
What kind of work does/did he do? \_\_\_\_\_
24. How far back can you trace your family past your  
grandparents? \_\_\_\_\_

## II. FOLKLIFE EXPERIENCES

1. What do you remember about the house you grew up in?

2. What do you remember about the town or community that you grew up in?

(II.)

3. What were some of the special occasions in your family or community? (holidays, family reunions, picnics, etc.)
4. Name some special homemade foods that you ate as a child.

(II.)

5. Do you have any special recipes that have been handed down in your family? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you be willing to share these recipes? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, write them down below.

6. Name and describe some of the games that you played as a child.



(II.)

7. What was your favorite game and how was it played?

8. Did anyone in the family ever make you any toys?

If so, what kind of toys?

(II.)

9. Did your parents ever have any hobbies or crafts which they did in their spare time? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, list them.

10. Do you have any hobbies or crafts? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, what are they?

11. Do you remember any stories that were told to you as a child? (ghost stories, local history legends, stories about famous or unusual people, family members, tall tales, humorous stories, etc.) If so, please try to tell your favorite story. Use both sides of this paper if needed.

(II.)

12. Do you remember any jokes or riddles from your childhood? Please tell some of your favorite jokes or riddles.

13. Did you know anyone who sang (old ballads, love songs, country songs, religious)? \_\_\_\_\_  
Who were they? \_\_\_\_\_  
What kinds of songs did they sing? \_\_\_\_\_  
Where did you hear them singing? \_\_\_\_\_

(II.)

14. Did you know anyone who played musical instruments? \_\_\_\_  
Who were they? \_\_\_\_  
What instruments did they play? \_\_\_\_  
Where did you hear them playing?

15. Did you know anyone who did any kind of dancing? \_\_\_\_  
Who were they? \_\_\_\_  
What kinds of dancing did they do? \_\_\_\_  
Where did you see them dancing?

16. Did you/ or do you still do any of the above (singing,  
instrument playing or dancing)? \_\_\_\_  
If so, what do you do and where?

(II.)

17. What kind of medicine did you take when you were sick?

Did your family use any home remedies?

If so, please describe them.

18. Do you remember any beliefs or sayings about the weather, good or bad luck, marriage, death, etc.? If so, name some of them.

19. What was the most valuable thing your parents or other adults ever told you about getting along in life?  
(Proverbs, sayings, etc.)

(II.)

20. Do you know anyone in your family or neighborhood who does any of the following? Plays oldtime or bluegrass music, does clog or flat foot dancing, takes part in square dances, tells stories about local history, ghosts, unusual personalities in their community, plants by the signs, knows old-fashioned homemade recipes, knows or uses home remedies, knows how to make homemade toys, remember how to play old-time games from childhood, or similar types of things.

If so, please list.

Name

Address

Phone #

Age

Activity

(II.)

21. For the interviewer:

How did you become acquainted with the person you have interviewed?

How much time did it take you to complete all the questions with the person you interviewed?

What is your name? \_\_\_\_\_

Your home address? \_\_\_\_\_

(Street)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(town) (State) (zip)

Your telephone? \_\_\_\_\_

## Interview Release Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, understand  
that a copy of the interview between me and \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ will be placed in the Archives  
of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson  
City, Tennessee, and that this material may be made  
available in the Archives for purposes of research; for  
instructional use; for publication; or for other related  
purposes.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewee (signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer (signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Address