

June 2020

The Radcliffe College Alumnae Oral History Project

1. Purpose

The purpose of this project is to use oral histories to record the undergraduate experiences of Radcliffe College alumnae from the classes of the late 1940s through 1979. These oral histories are being contributed to the Radcliffe College Archives at the Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America at Harvard University.

One of the missions of the Schlesinger is to collect and archive the history of Radcliffe College. We know from the Schlesinger's librarians that the library currently contains very little material about Radcliffe undergraduate life during the period from the late 1940s to the point in the late 1970s when classes and college life at Harvard-Radcliffe became more equally coeducational -- in other words, during the time when Radcliffe College was more separate than equal.

Many alumnae, including those who fully support coeducation, think the history of Radcliffe College itself has disappeared from public conversation and memory at Harvard and the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study. We believe a careful documentation of the lived experience of alumnae from these decades is an essential contribution to the history of Radcliffe College, as well as to the broader history of women in higher education.

2. The Project

The project was begun by a committee of the Radcliffe Club of San Francisco in 2019. Oral history interviews with an interview guide developed by the committee began in January. Then came the pandemic and the necessity to figure out how to interview and record online. As of early June, we have completed three oral histories and have sent the recordings and professional transcriptions to the Schlesinger. Several more interviews are in progress and we hope to send at least three more to the Schlesinger by mid-summer.

The initial interviews have focused on alumnae from the classes of the 1940s and 1950s. Most of the alumnae have been from the San Francisco Bay Area, but we are now using online audio recordings to obtain the oral histories of alumnae from other regions. Eventually we want to expand the project to alumnae from the 1960s and 1970s.

The interviews are conducted by volunteer alumnae and take 60 to 90 minutes. They cover three general topics:

- 1) Radcliffe College life.
- 2) Academic experience.
- 3) The alumna's retrospective view of her experience.

3. Funding and Contact Information

Last fall, the Radcliffe Club of San Francisco donated \$2,500 in seed money to the project and a private donor gave an additional \$1,000. This initial funding has paid for oral history consultation and training; equipment for recordings that meet the oral history requirements of the Schlesinger Library; and professional transcriptions of the interviews.

We estimate that the remainder of our initial funding would pay for three or four more transcriptions, in addition to the three already completed. The average cost of a transcription, providing a transcription booklet to the alumna interviewed, and some operating expenses is about \$250 per interview.

In April, the Schlesinger awarded the project one of its four Oral History Grants for 2020-21. These grants usually provide \$3,000, but the library was unable to fund them this year, so it is an honorary award. We also have a second Schlesinger grant application pending, but we have not heard back from the Schlesinger as of early June.

We are now looking for donations to fund primarily the professional transcriptions that the Schlesinger requires for additional oral history interviews.

If you are able to donate, the contribution is tax-deductible and will go directly to the Radcliffe Club of San Francisco, which is a 501c3 organization and is the sponsor of the Radcliffe College Alumnae Oral History Project. You can send a check to:

Radcliffe Club of San Francisco
c/o Kathy Henschel, Treasurer
108 Poppy Court
Walnut Creek, CA 94596
Write in Memo: Oral History Project

We are developing a web page and a link for credit card donations.

The Project Director, Alice Abarbanel '66, welcomes any inquiries to learn more about this project. You can reach her at radcliffecollegevoices@gmail.com.