

## **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's Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.

Radcliffe undergraduate life during this period has minimal oral history documentation at the Schlesinger Library. The project organizers feel a sense of urgency to give interested alumnae from these years, especially the older alumnae, a chance to tell their stories.

The period from the 1940s through the 1970s spans the transition from the time when Radcliffe had a separate administration, admissions and dormitories to the point when classes and college life at Harvard-Radcliffe became more equally coeducational – in other words, the era 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 from memory at Harvard and at 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 August 2020, we have completed eleven oral histories. Several more interviews are in progress and we plan to send all the recordings and professional transcriptions to the Schlesinger Library by the end of the summer.

The interviews are conducted by volunteer alumnae, and the recordings and transcripts are prepared according to the Schlesinger's archival standards. The Schlesinger Library has welcomed the oral histories and has given guidance on how to submit materials that meet its standards.

The initial interviews have focused on alumnae from the classes of the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. All these women received a Radcliffe College diploma in Latin. We started with alumnae from the San Francisco Bay Area, and now we use online audio recordings to interview alumnae from other regions. Eventually we will expand the project to alumnae from the rest of the 1960s and 1970s.

The interviews cover three general topics:

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

### **3. Funding of the Project**

The Radcliffe Club of San Francisco provided an initial grant of seed money for the project last year. Other donations have come from individual donors, including Radcliffe alumnae and other supporters of the project. In July, the Schlesinger Library through the Radcliffe Institute provided additional seed money for this pilot project.

Funding from donations and grants has been used to pay for consultation on oral history practices; training of interviewers; equipment for recordings that meet the requirements of the Schlesinger Library; and professional transcriptions of the interviews.

Additional donations are welcome and would be used to help pay for more interview transcriptions and the training of additional volunteer interviewers. The average cost of preparing a transcription, providing a transcription booklet to the alumna interviewed, and some operating expenses is about \$250 per interview.

Tax-deductible contributions can be made through the Radcliffe Club of San Francisco, which is a 501c3 organization. Donors can use the Dues and Contributions button on the RCSF website at <https://www.radcliffeclubsf.org/> and can donate either online or by check mailed to the address given on the webpage. If you mail a check, please indicate Oral History Project donation.

The Radcliffe Club of San Francisco is an official club within the Harvard Alumni Association and is the only remaining independent Radcliffe Club in the world.

### **4. Contact Information**

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