

The Radcliffe College Alumnae Oral History Project

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 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.

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.

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 2020. Then came the pandemic and the necessity to figure out how to interview and record online. We expect to have completed 35 to 40 oral interviews by the end of 2020. The recordings and professional transcriptions of the interviews are sent to the Schlesinger Library.

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 their standards. The Schlesinger also awarded the project one of its four Oral History Grants for 2020-21; the award is honorary because funding for the program was not available this year.

The first phase of the project has focused on alumnae from the classes of the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s. All these women received a Radcliffe College diploma that was written in Latin. We started with alumnae from the San Francisco Bay Area, and then expanded to interviews with alumnae from other regions, primarily with the use of online audio or video

recordings. The second phase will extend the project to alumnae from the classes of 1963 to 1979. Starting in 1963, women undergraduates received a Harvard diploma. The class of 1979 was the last class to be admitted by a separate Radcliffe Admissions Office.

The Oral History interviews cover three general topics:

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

Funding of the Project

The interviewers are alumnae volunteers. 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.

The Radcliffe Club of San Francisco provided an initial grant of seed money for the project in 2019. Other donations have come from individuals, including Radcliffe alumnae and other supporters of the project. In July 2020, the Schlesinger Library awarded additional funding.

Additional donations are welcome and would be used to 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 \$300 per interview.

Tax-deductible contributions can be made through the Radcliffe Club of San Francisco, which is a 501(c)(3) organization. Donors can use this link: radcliffeclubsf.org/RCAOHP, or can mail a check to the Radcliffe Club of San Francisco, c/o Kathy Henschel, Treasurer, 108 Poppy Court, Walnut Creek, CA 94596. Please write *Oral History Project* in the check memo.

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.

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.