

# Schumann-Scheel House Internship

For our internship, my partner and I conducted oral history interviews on members of the Scheel family on behalf of the Converse Historic Preservation Commission. The commission wishes to transform the Schumann-Scheel house, which was donated by the Scheel family, into a museum seeing as the Schumann-Scheel family is one of the oldest families in the Converse area. For my final project, I discussed the technical aspects and best practices used to conduct a good oral history interview.

The Schumann-Scheel homestead is one of the oldest standing houses in Converse to this day. The original property, which consisted of 120 acres, was purchased by Anton Schumann on January 11, 1900 from Edward Hall who had bought it from Converse's namesake, Major James Converse. Schumann built the house throughout the year 1900 and had it finished by the time he married his wife, Ida Siebold, on January 22, 1901.

The Schumann's were able to add onto their farm over the years by purchasing more land and gave birth to 6 children. After Ida died in 1947 and Anton in 1949 the house was occupied by their daughter Mary Hildegard along with her husband, Adolph Joseph Scheel and their 11 children. Like the Schumann's, the Scheel's also added more land and additions to the house over the years. Mary passed away in the year 2000 and the farm remained under Adolf's care until 2008 when he too passed away.

After Adolf's passing the land went to his children which they owned until they eventually sold some of the land to be used as a subdivision, which was named *Scheel Farms* after them, and the rest, per Adolf's request not too long before his death, was donated to the city of Converse to be used as a park and also convert the house into a museum. One of the biggest reasons why everyone we talked too believed it was so important that the house be preserved is because there are not too many historic buildings left in Converse today. Converse was a very small town and despite being founded at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it did not see more than a 1,000 residents until the 1960's. Since then, Converse has grown to over 18,000 people but with all the new developments much of the city's historic buildings and land were either torn down or

built upon. Because of this many residents of Converse have found a new appreciation for their history and wish to see it preserved.

Mariana and I were tasked with conducting and filming oral history interviews of Adolf and Mary Scheel's children which could later be used as pieces in the proposed museum. We wanted to capture various scenes from their childhood as told by them so that we, the commission, and future visitors could get a better understanding of how life was for them growing up and just how the homestead and the city of Converse changed over the years.

To do this, we first researched the city of Converse and the Schumann-Scheel family in order to get a better understanding of their history and to determine what would be appropriate questions to ask of those that we interviewed. We also read material on how we could better conduct oral histories and our interviews in order to make them as professional as possible. Before conducting our interviews we had to consolidate the necessary equipment needed in order to properly film and record audio. After doing this and discussing where we would film we began to form the questions which we would use as a baseline for our interviews. We would then meet with our interview subjects and conduct our interviews. After this I would work on editing the interviews and we would start planning for the next weeks interviews.

To me, our project was significant because it gave us the opportunity to be a part of something that is still relatively in its early stages. It was also very apparent that conducting our interviews with the Scheel family was very significant to them as they recognized that their stories were going to be shared with future generations to come.

Had we not done this internship this Boerne and Houston native would also never have learned about the history of Converse or the Schumann-Scheel house as well. It was also nice to see that the city was putting its best foot forward in trying to preserve their history after neglecting it for so long.

**For my best practices I will be going over the best practices when conducting a filmed oral history interview as I did in my capstone presentation.**

One of the most important things to do when conducting your interview is to make sure that the interview subject is comfortable. Sometimes, the people you are working with will not be used to having a camera pointed at their face and being “grilled” with questions repeatedly. This is not a bad thing per se but it can hinder the quality of the interview especially if the subject is stumbling over words or looks as if they are not enjoying their time while being interviewed. One of the things you can do before diving straight into your interview is just talk with your subject beforehand. Asking them questions or taking the time to get to know them and introduce yourself can do a lot to ease the tension or nervousness and can help to make it seem more like a conversation between acquaintances as opposed to an interrogation.

Another thing that is important would be making sure to go at the subjects pace while conducting the interview. By this I mean that it is important to realize that it may be a bit daunting to keep asking questions one after another to a first time interviewee. In order to help keep the subject relaxed it is important you conduct the interview at a pace that the subject is comfortable with. If the subject needs to take a break then the

interviewer should allow them to be able to and help them decompress by talking to them off the record.

Now, getting into the technical aspects of the filming it is important to keep in mind some techniques so that your interview looks somewhat professional. One of the things we tried to ensure was always proper was framing of the subject. You want to position them so that the subject's body is always in the frame as well. Oftentimes people will emote their feelings with their body language while talking and it can be an important thing to capture. You also do not want there to be a lot of dead space in the film as well so this is another thing to consider when framing your subject. Making sure lighting and audio is as best as can be is also ideal. This means filming in a well-lit room with little background noise would be best. During our first interview we tried filming on the front porch of the house but the lighting was not always great and there was a large amount of background noise from wind and planes in the background.