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Oral history on the web

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Oral History on the Web

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Welcome to the session on Oral History on the Web. We will be discussing the evolving world of the oral history center on the Internet. It will be a discussion for people interested in how to create a basic site for their own oral history center.

There are more and more oral history centers utilizing the Internet to provide access to their interviews. You see a range of services for a researcher now. This includes access to websites with an index of records, actual transcripts, and even audio & video files.

Today we will be talking about several aspects of these websites including a current list of sites, the UNLV Oral History Research Center website, the Nevada Test Site Oral History Project, and steps to creating a basic oral history center website.

A good source for a current list of oral history centers on the web comes from the Oral History Association (OHA) and Humanities and Social Sciences Online. Here is it's URL: **http://www.h-net.org/~oralhist/centers.html**
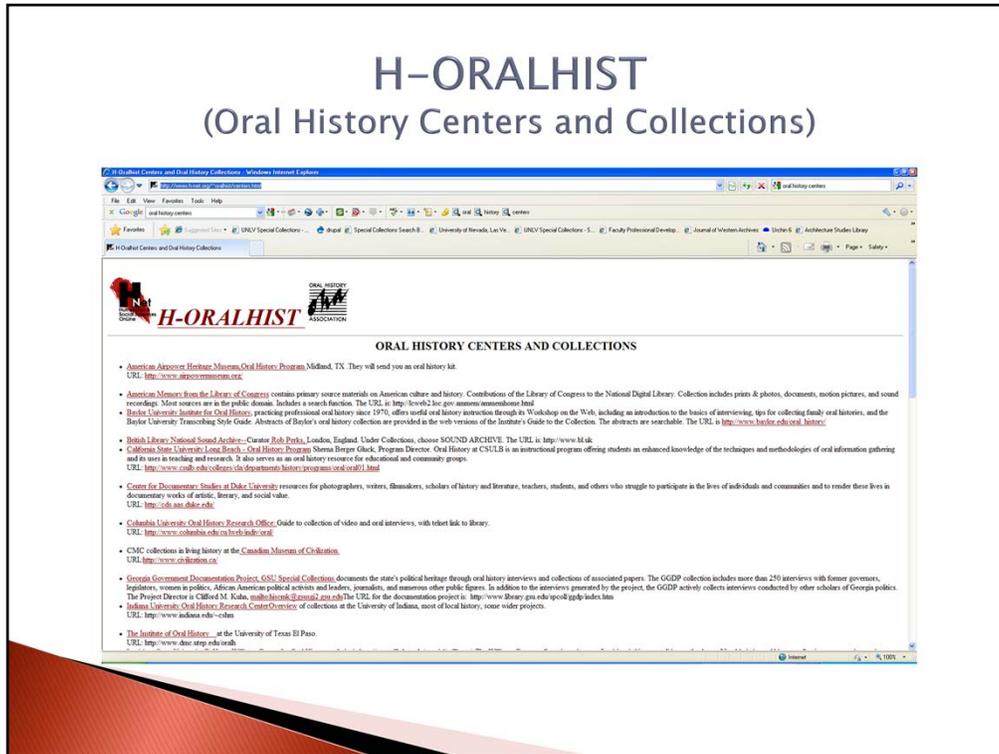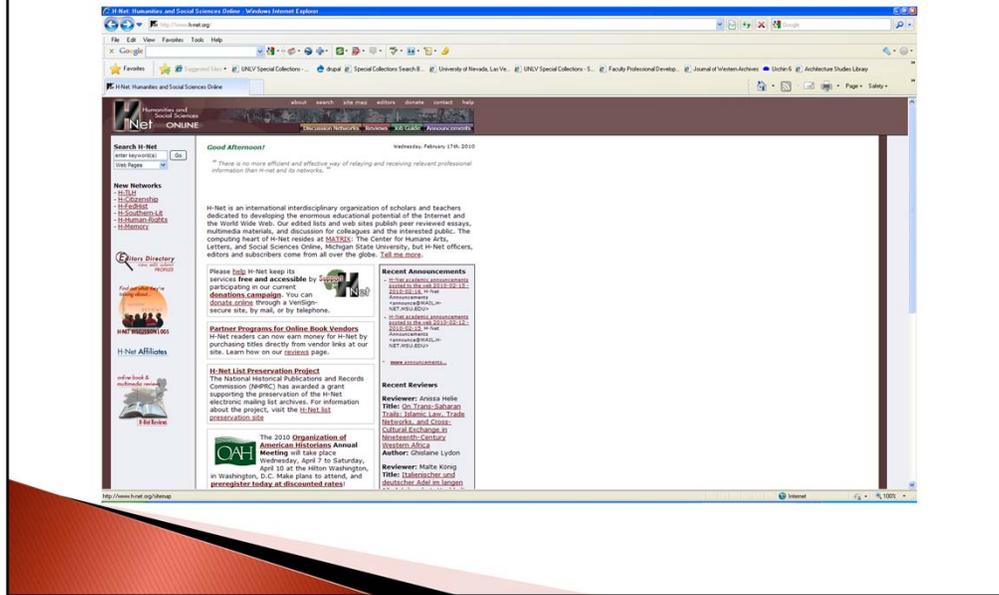
The sites listed here range from historical societies to university related oral history centers. There are even international sites.

This list is a comprehensive list of oral history centers from around the world. However, it's primary focus is American centers for oral history.

Here is the homepage for the Humanities & Social Sciences Online website.

Oral History Association
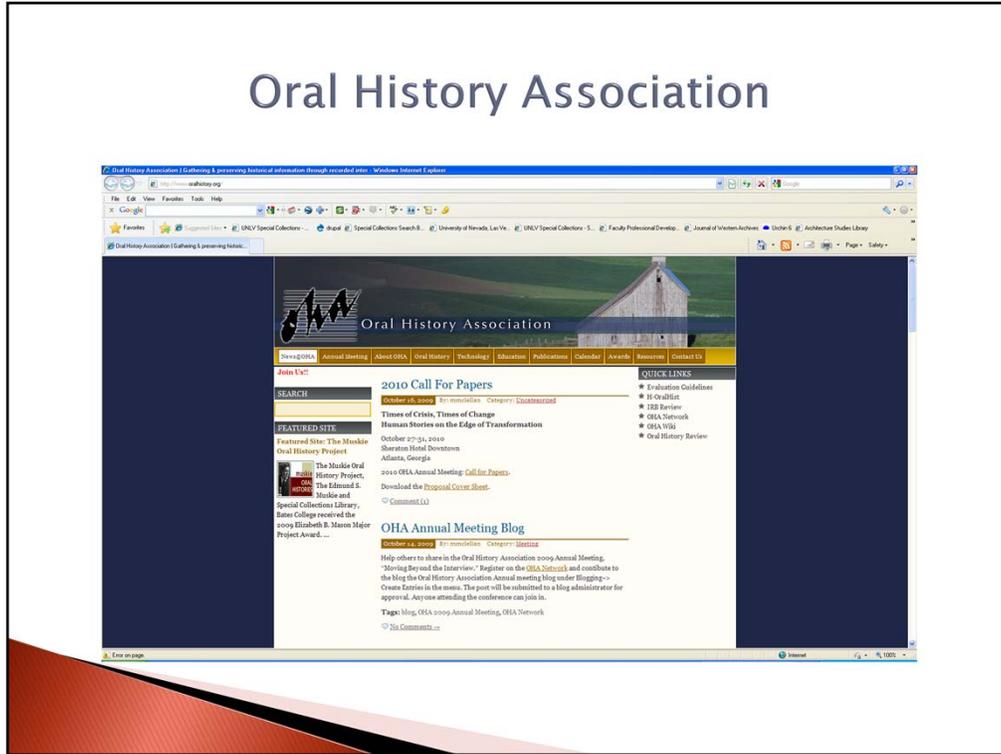
Here is the homepage for the Oral History Association website.
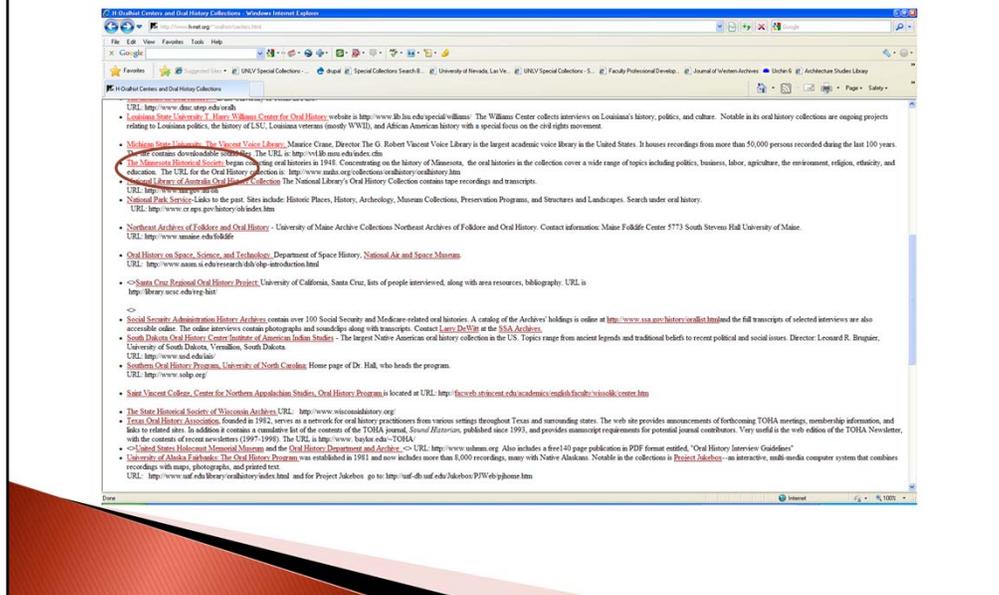
Some of the sites on the H-Oralhist website include a link to historical societies like the Minnesota Historical Society **(click).**
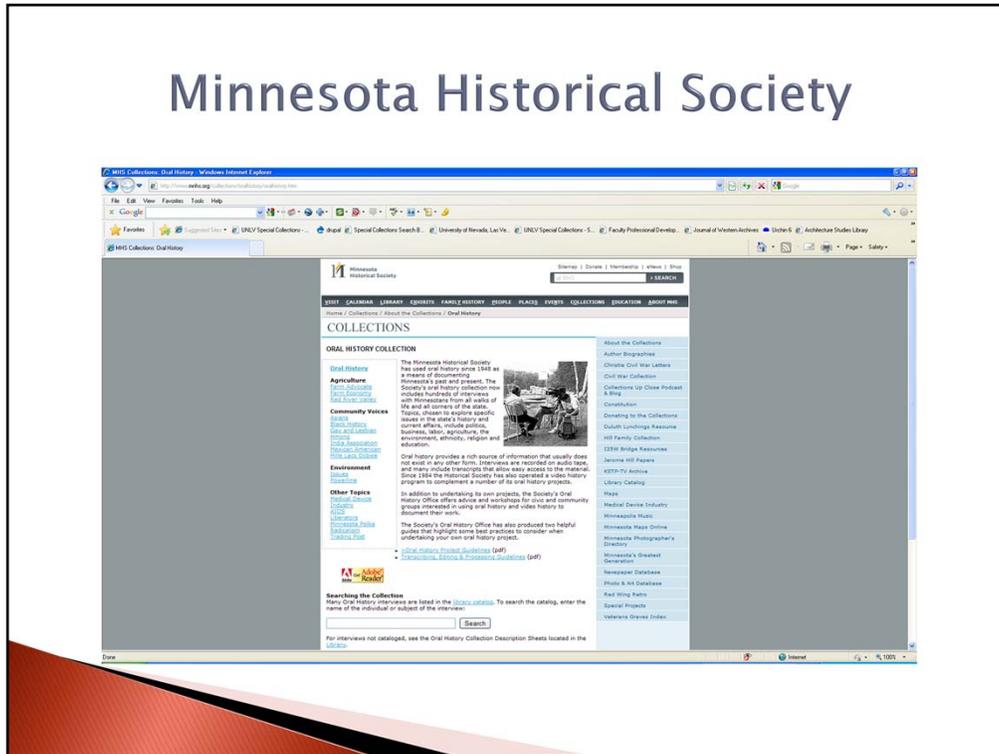
Minnesota Historical Society Oral History Collection
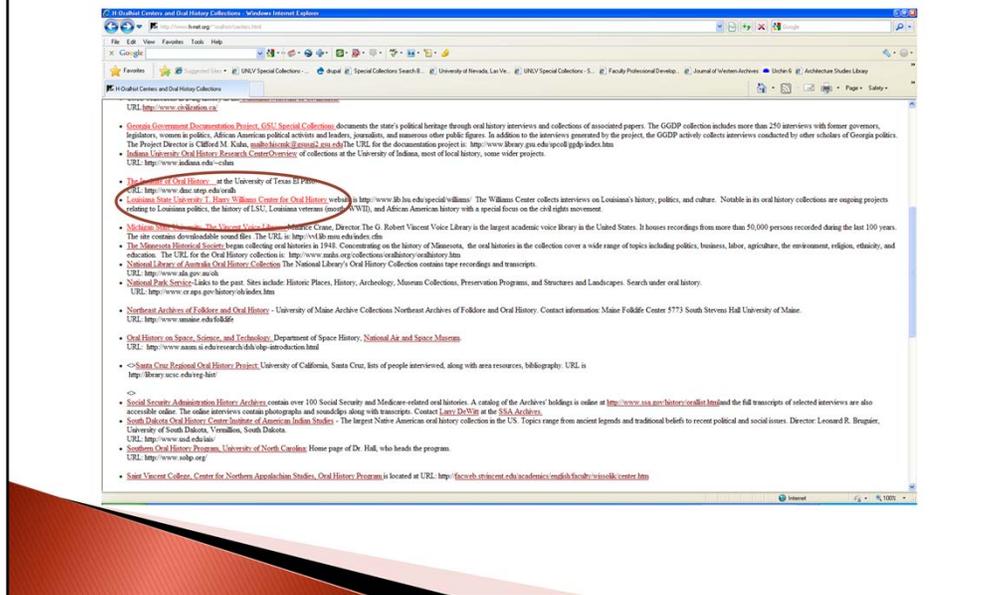
And university oral history centers like the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History from Louisiana State University **(click).**

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History
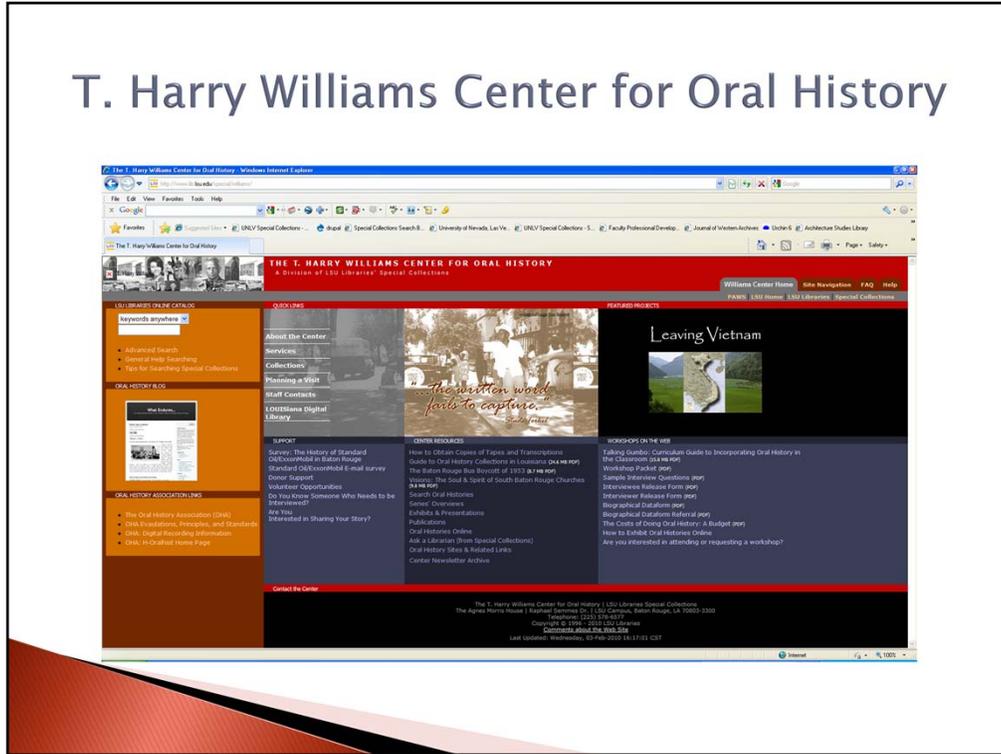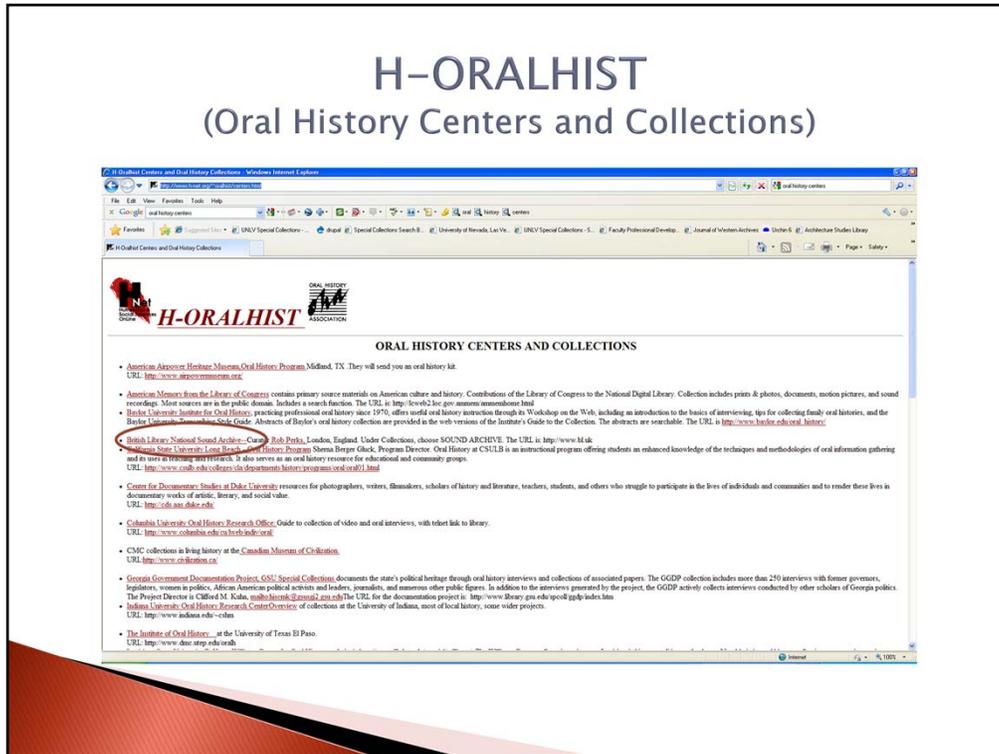
There are even some websites from around the world like The British Library's Oral History Center **(click).**
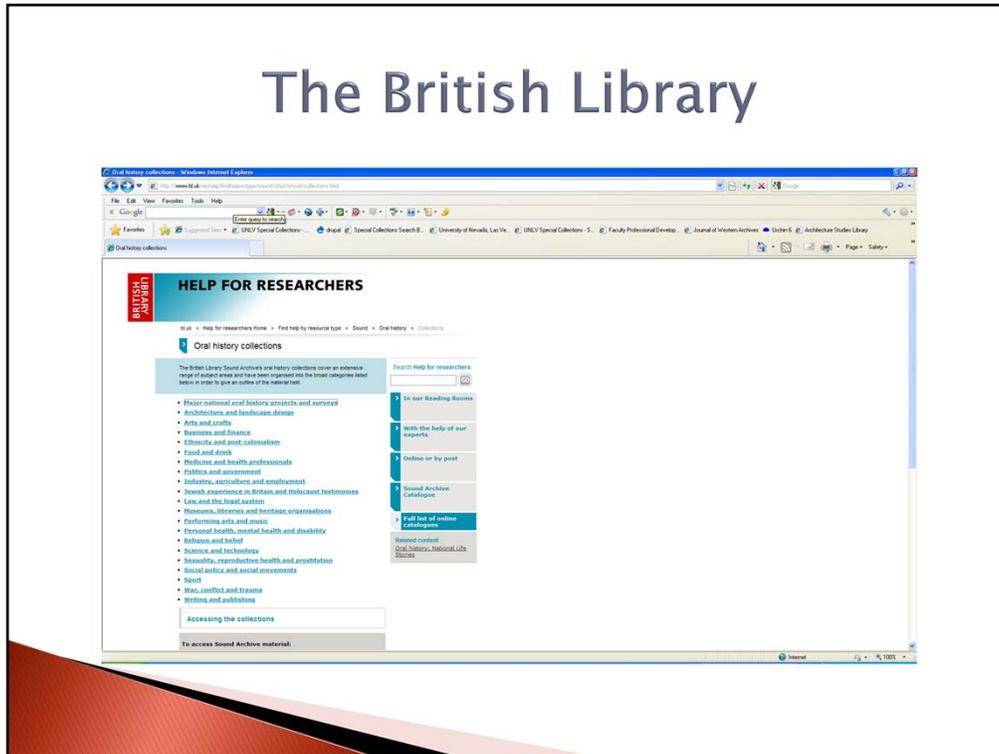
Oral History Collections at The British Library

Common Features

▸ General Information/About

After a survey of the sites listed on the H-Oralhist page one finds several common features among them. **(click)** One common feature was a "**General Information/About**" page.

A nice example of a site using the "General Information/About" page comes from Columbia University's Oral History Research Office. **(click)** This page includes links to information regarding **staff**, **advisory committee**, **hours**, and **directions**.

Common Features

- General Information/About
- Online Index

Another common feature found on oral history center websites is the "**online index**." **(click)** The nice thing about the online index is that it's fairly easy to create in web editor software.
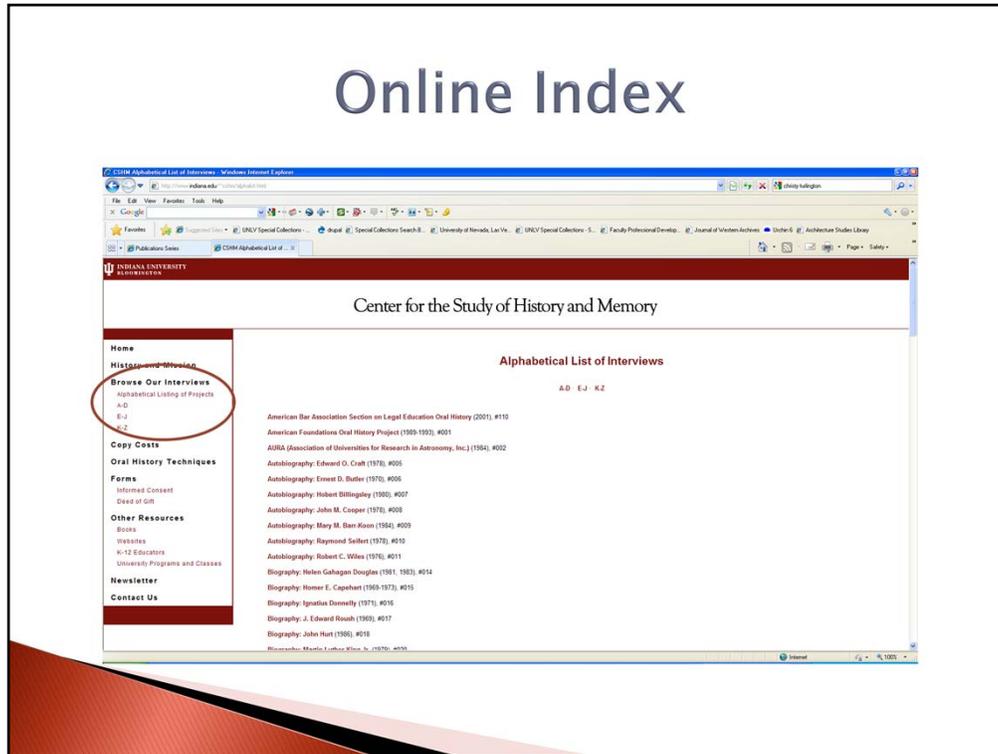
A good example of an online index comes from **Indiana University's Center for the Study of History and Memory**. **(click)** Here they have made it easy to locate their interviews by adding the link "Alphabetical Listing of Projects" on their left navigation bar. Further, they have aided the search by including annotated records to the index.

Oral History websites have been adding a more advanced feature to their homepages. This advanced feature is the "**search box**" or database. **(click)** Administrators of oral history websites know that a researcher doesn't want to spend too much time drilling down a site in order to get to an interview or a record of an interview. That is why more and more oral history centers are working with their IT departments in order to create a search interface that can access their records quickly. The search box or database that is placed on the homepage has become a logical answer for accessing records of a large website. A good example of this new search box feature comes from Michigan State University's Vincent Voice Library.

Search Box/Database
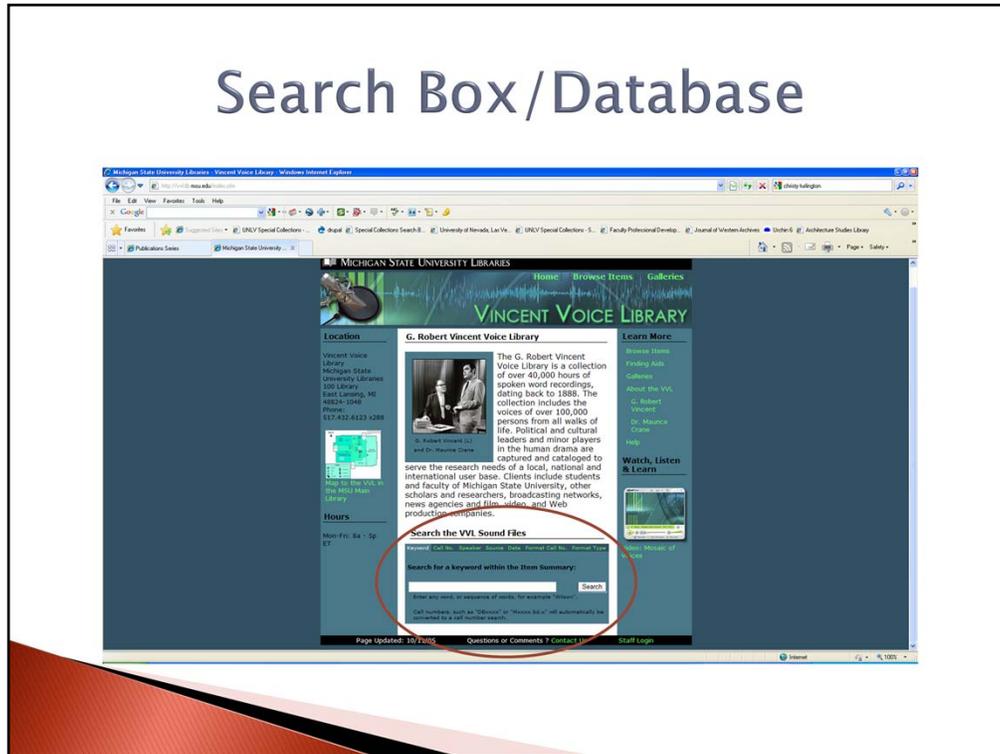
Here you will find a search box with many options to access their sound files. **(click)** For example, you will find the ability to search by "keyword", "call no.", "speaker", "source", "date", "format call no.", and "format type."

Another common aspect found on oral history websites is the "**featured projects**." **(click)** Oral history websites will showcase projects of particular significance based on a local context.
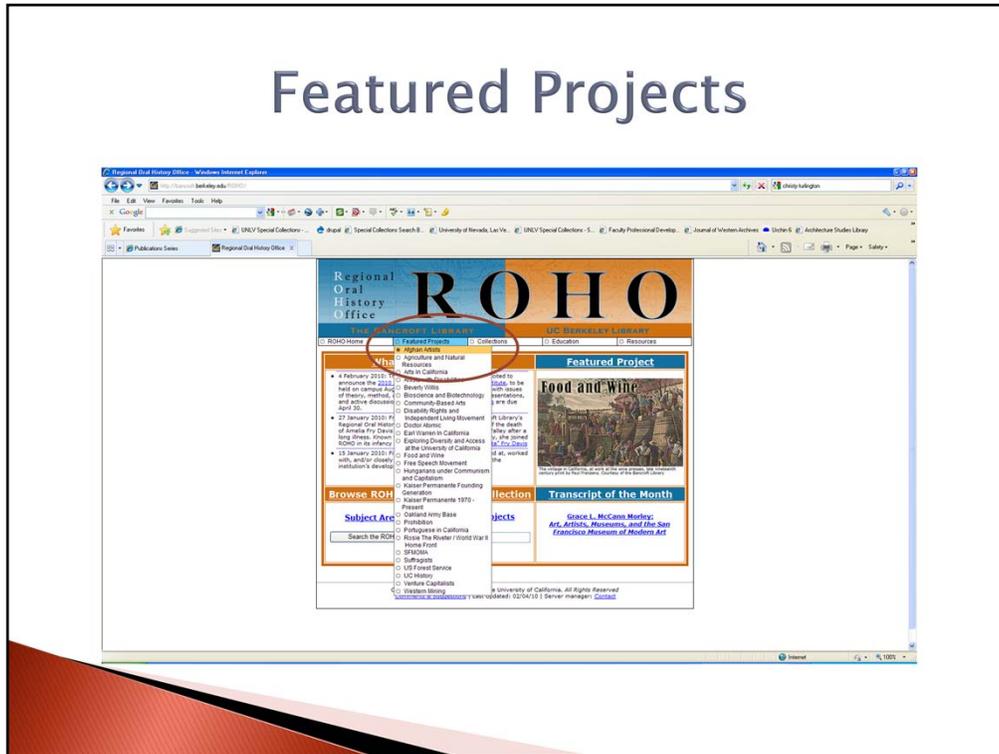
The University of California at Berkley's Regional Oral History Office includes a list of featured projects. **(click)** Their projects range from Afghan Artists to Western Mining.
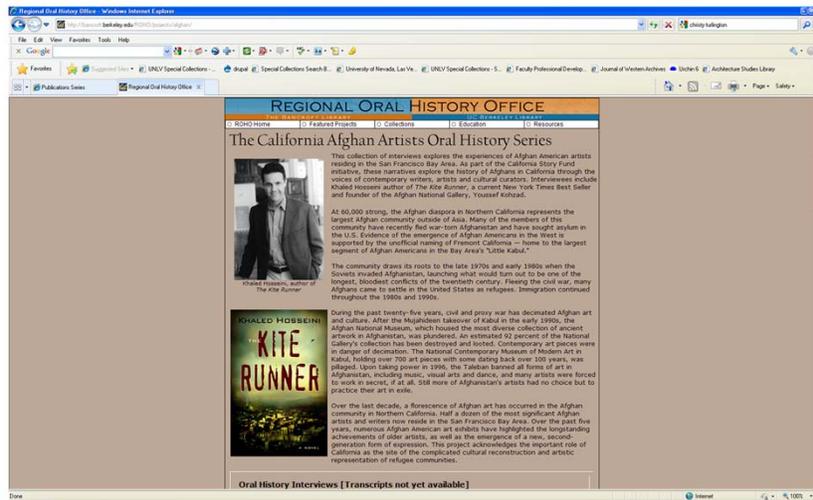
The Afghan Artists project is a collection of interviews that explores the experiences of Afghan American artists residing in the San Francisco Bay area.

Common Features

▸ General Information/About
▸ Online Index
▸ Search Box/Database
▸ Featured Projects
▸ How to Use the Collection

Oral history centers try to inform their researchers as to the various organizational rules and guidelines through their websites, as well. They will often title this page, "**How to Use the Collection**." **(click)**
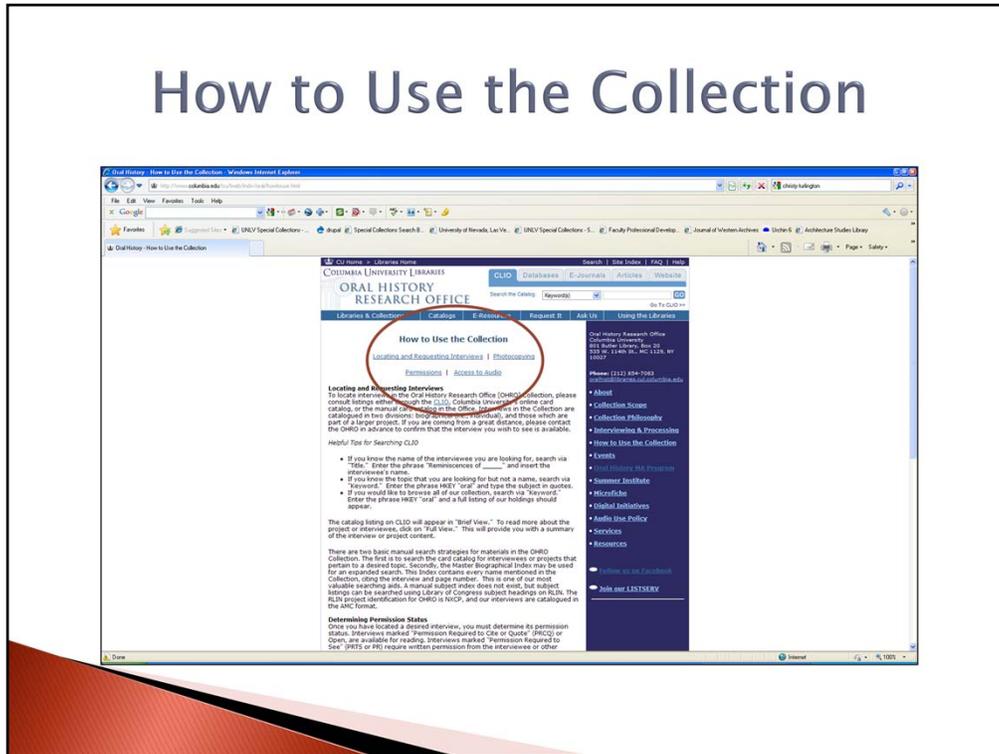
A nice example of a "**How to Use the Collection**" page comes from the Columbia University's Oral History Research Office. **(click)** Here you will find useful information regarding "**locating and requesting interviews**", "**photocopying**", "**permissions**", and "**access to audio**." All these pieces of information allow for the appropriate use of a oral history center's collections.

Common Features

▸ General Information/About
▸ Online Index
▸ Search Box/Database
▸ Featured Projects
▸ How to Use the Collection
▸ Contact Us

Another common aspect found on oral history center websites is the "**contact us**" feature. **(click)** All websites should include this feature because a researcher may need more help than the site can provide. Some sites will have a page with a list of staff and their contact information. Others use a form to fill out and submit to a staff member.
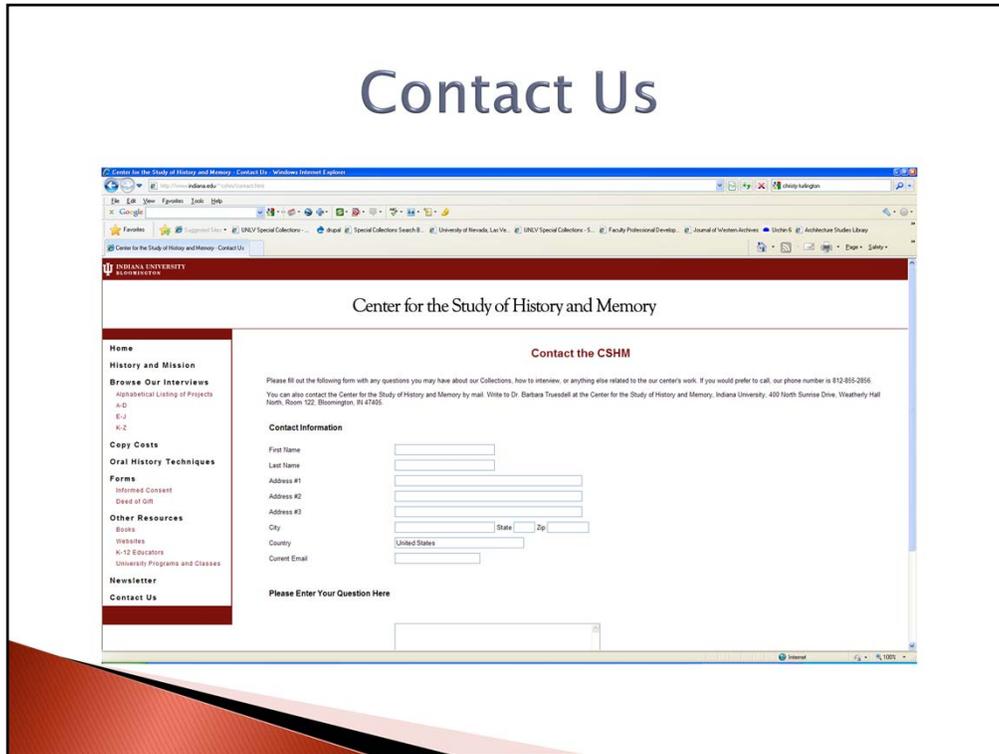
A nice example of a website that utilizes the contact feature comes from **Indiana University's Center for the Study of History and Memory**.

Here a form is provided to a researcher. **(click)** It not only provides space for a patron's contact information, but a text box for their research question. Once completed a patron hits the send button at the bottom of the form. This question will then be forwarded to the appropriate staff member at the Center for the Study of the History and Memory.

Common Features

▸ General Information/About
▸ Online Index
▸ Search Box/Database
▸ Featured Projects
▸ How to Use the Collection
▸ Contact Us
▸ Resources

Lastly, another common feature found on oral history center websites is the "**resources**" link. **(click)** This is an important feature that allows researchers to go beyond the oral history center website that they are currently on at the moment. Oral history center websites try to be as helpful to the researcher as possible by providing a resources page with links to other oral history centers, governmental programs, books, and classes. The ultimate goal is to be able to point a researcher in the right direction even if they can not locate information on the current a center's site.
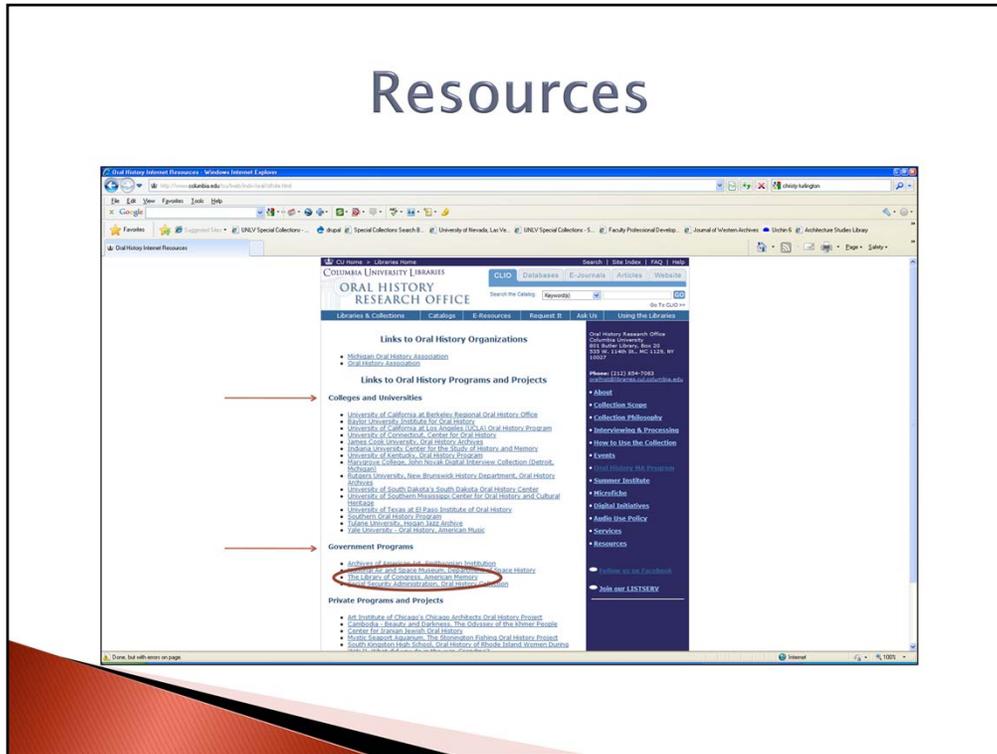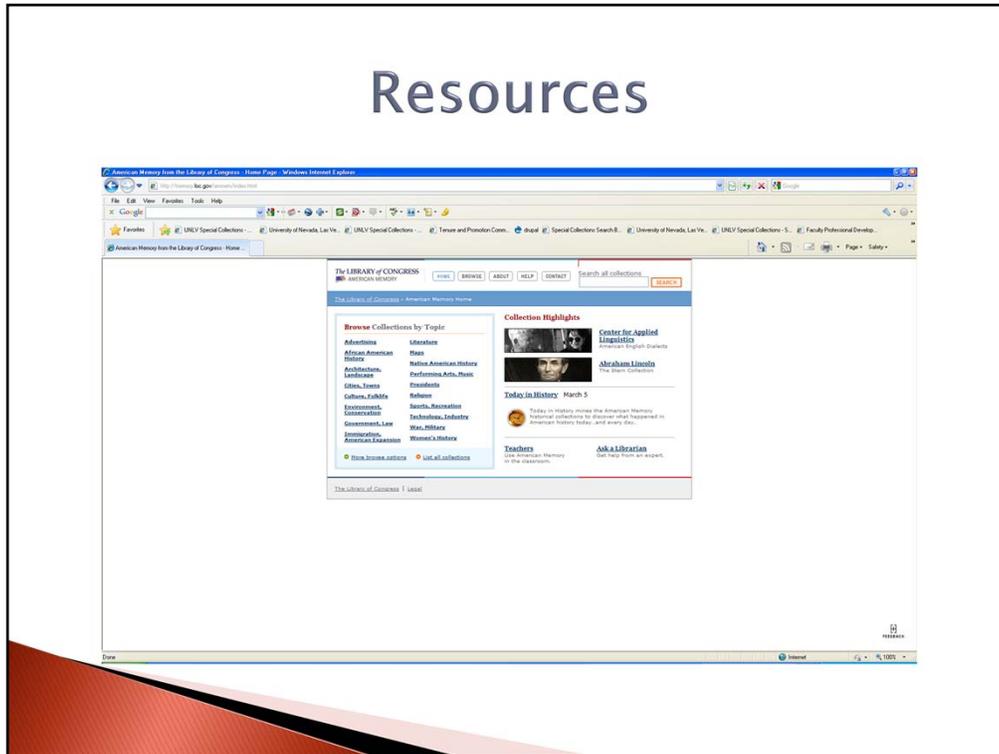
A good example of a resources page comes from **Columbia University Libraries' Oral History Research Office**. **(click)** Here you will find links to other colleges and university's with oral history centers.

(click) There are even links to **governmental programs** related to oral history like **The Library of Congress' American Memory**. **(click)**

Resources
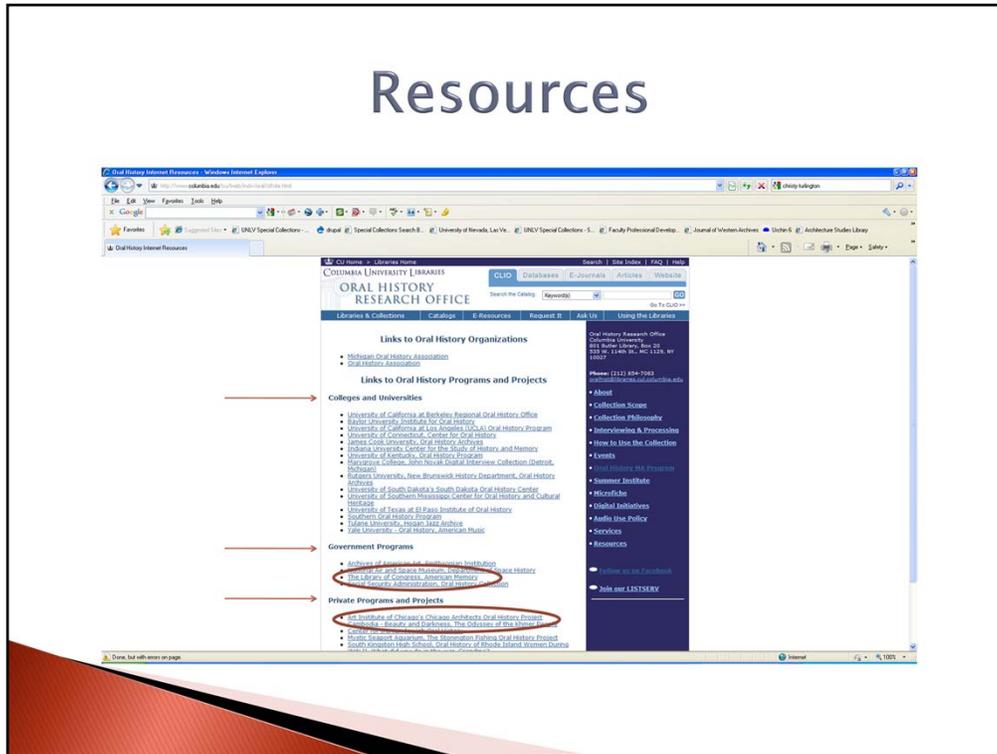
(click) There is even a list of links to **private programs** and **projects** like **The Art Institute of Chicago's The Chicago Architects Oral History Project**. **(click)**

Resources

A patron has a wide range of resources on this site to help them with their research.

Now I want to turn our attention to the Oral History Research Center at UNLV Libraries. This is a great example of a site with useful features for a researcher of Las Vegas and Southern Nevada history. The site features an **About** page **(click)** , a **List of Current Projects (click)** , **List of Oral Histories (i.e., inventories) (click)** , and **Opportunities (click)** for giving to the UNLV Oral History Research Center.

The site even features access to some audio, video and transcript files.

Nevada Test Site Oral History Project (digital collection)
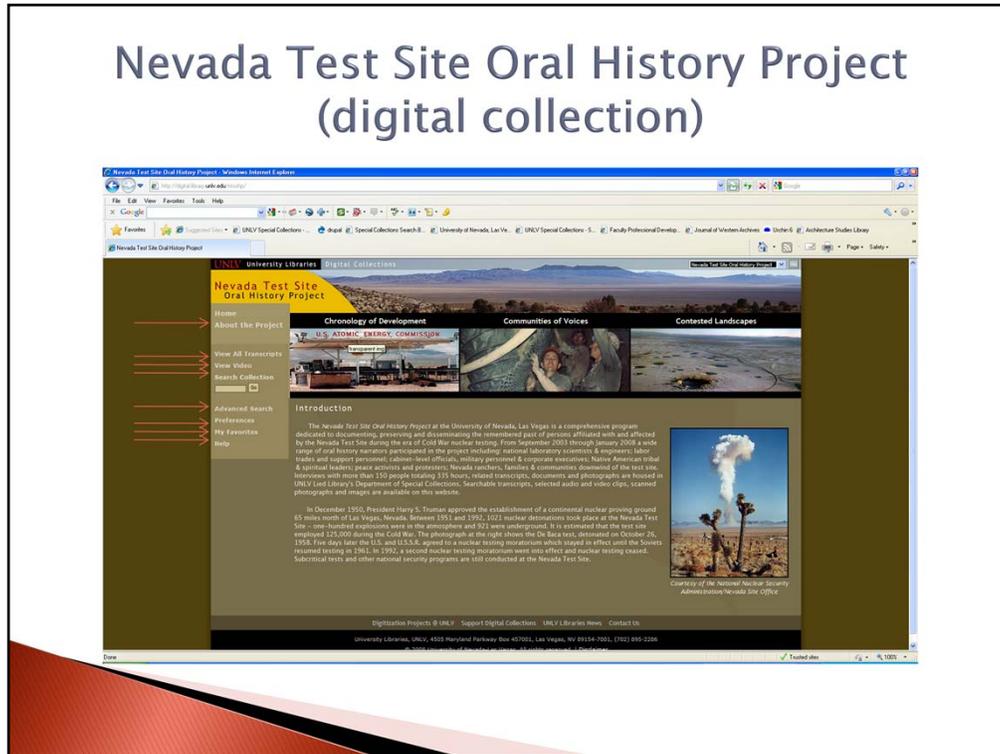
Next, I would like to turn our attention to the **Nevada Test Site Oral History Project** – which is located on the UNLV Libraries website. It represents the next generation in delivering historical material to researchers of oral history. This website provides a database that provides not only records, but photographs, audio and video files and transcripts. This site can provide these aspects because it utilizes a ContentDM database. ContentDM databases are being used by many university libraries throughout the country because of it's ability to store data and digital objects in large batches. Also, ContentDM allows an institution to use a Web-based search interface and customizable display templates. This dynamic database provides access to oral history material like never before.

There are several features on the Nevada Test Site Oral History Project. They include an "**About**" page **(click)** , a "**View All Transcripts**" page **(click)** , a "**View Video**" page **(click),** a "**Search Collection**" page **(click)** , a "**Advanced Search**" page **(click)** , a "**Preferences**" page **(click)** , a "**My Favorites**" page **(click)** , and a "**Help**" page **(click)** .
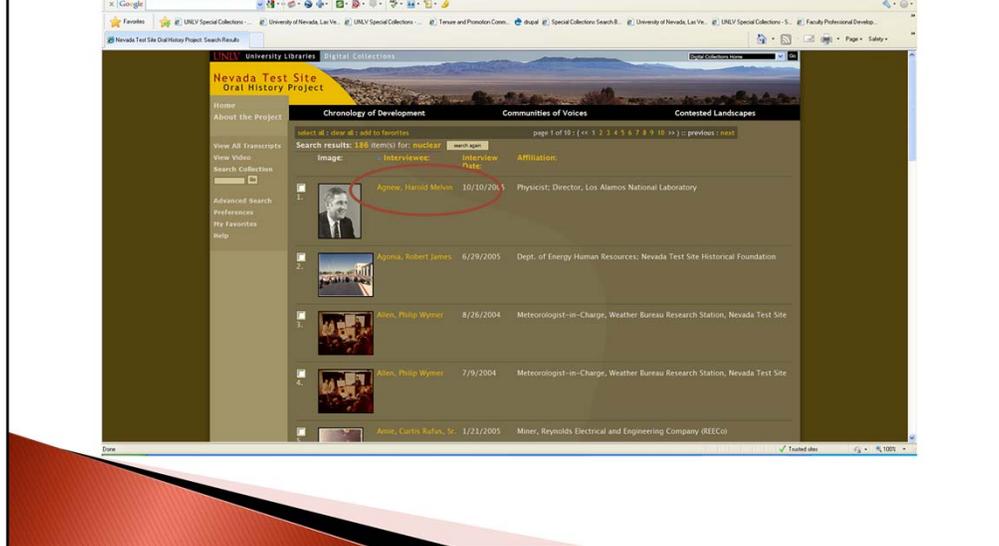
A researcher can search the collection by adding a term in the search box which is located on the left navigation bar and receive a list of records. The researcher can then choose a record to access an oral history interview. For example, one can type in the keyword "nuclear" and receive the following list.

(click) If we click on **Agnew, Harold Melvin**, then…

Nevada Test Site Oral History Project
(digital collection)
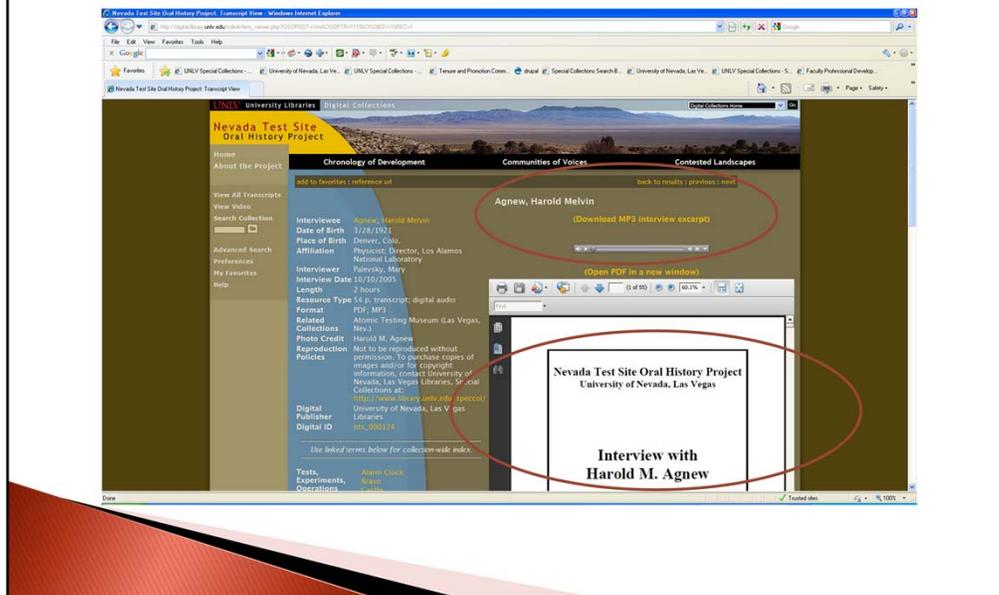
…it will take you to a record with a copy of the **interview transcript** (pdf file) **(click)** and an **audio** (mp3) **file (click).**

The **UNLV Libraries' Web and Digitization Services** and **Special Collection**s departments coordinated together to create this dynamic ContentDM database for oral historians.

**Basic Steps to Creating an
Oral History Center Website**

‣ HTML Editor (Dreamweaver)

There are several steps one can follow in order to create a basic oral history center website. First, one needs to select web page editor software. **(click)** One example of this could be the web editor software called **Dreamweaver**.

Dreamweaver Web Page Editor
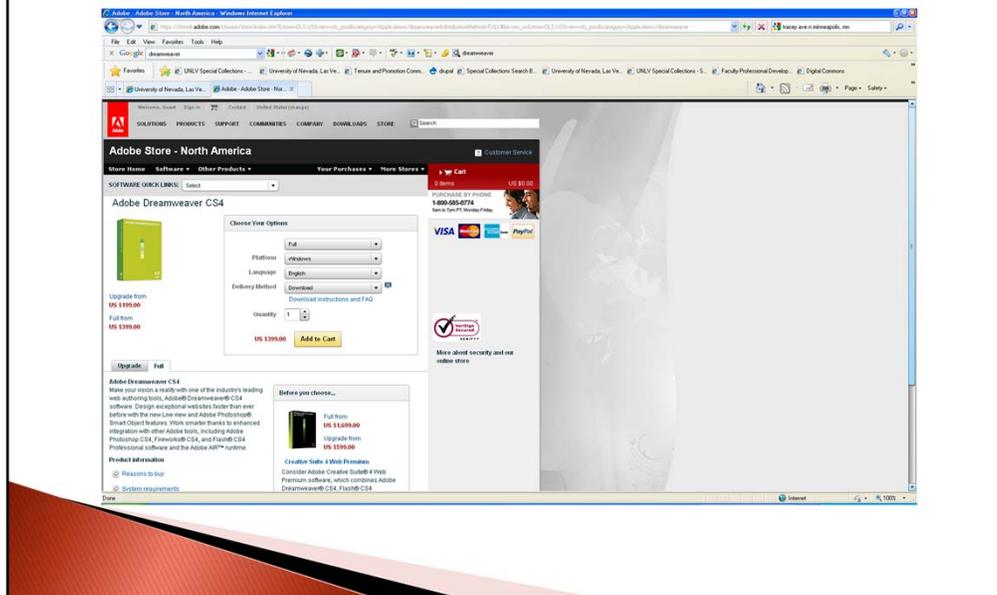
This software allows you to create a basic or advanced web page (i.e., html pages). It can cost you around $399.00 from the Adobe website. This application comes with a guide book and in-product tutorials that help create your website.

Dreamweaver Web Page Editor
(Design and Code View)
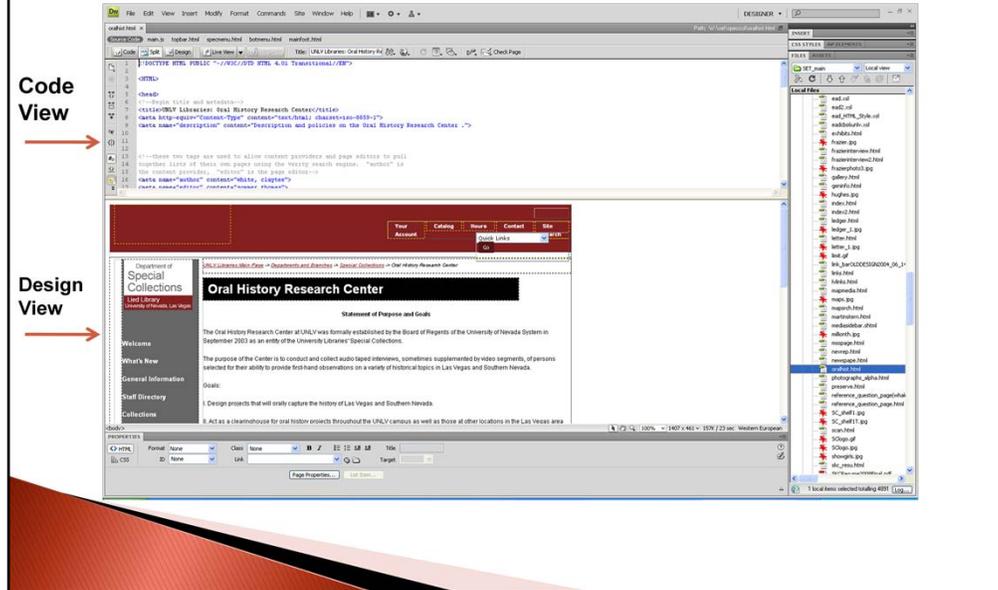
Once you open this application you see two views as you work on a web page. You can see not only a **design view (click),** but a **code view (click).** Some web page editors like to use the code view so that they can add metadata to the page. Metadata helps search engines like Google to locate your oral history center's website. You can add keywords to the metadata section of the code like "oral history center", "interviews", etc. You can even add description information regarding your center within the metadata. All of this helps a search engine to locate your web page or site in a more expedient manner.
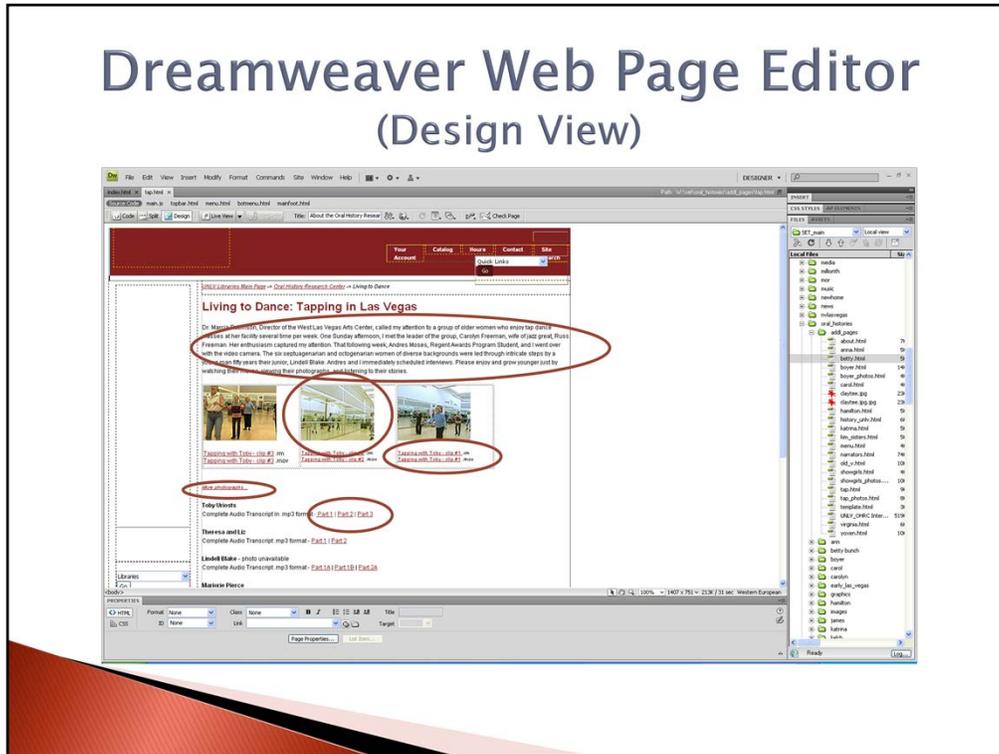
The design pane is where you will add your content. For example, you can add your **text (click), links (click), photos (click), audio & video files (click, click)** and even links to your transcripts (i.e., PDF files).

Dreamweaver Web Page Editor
(Design View)
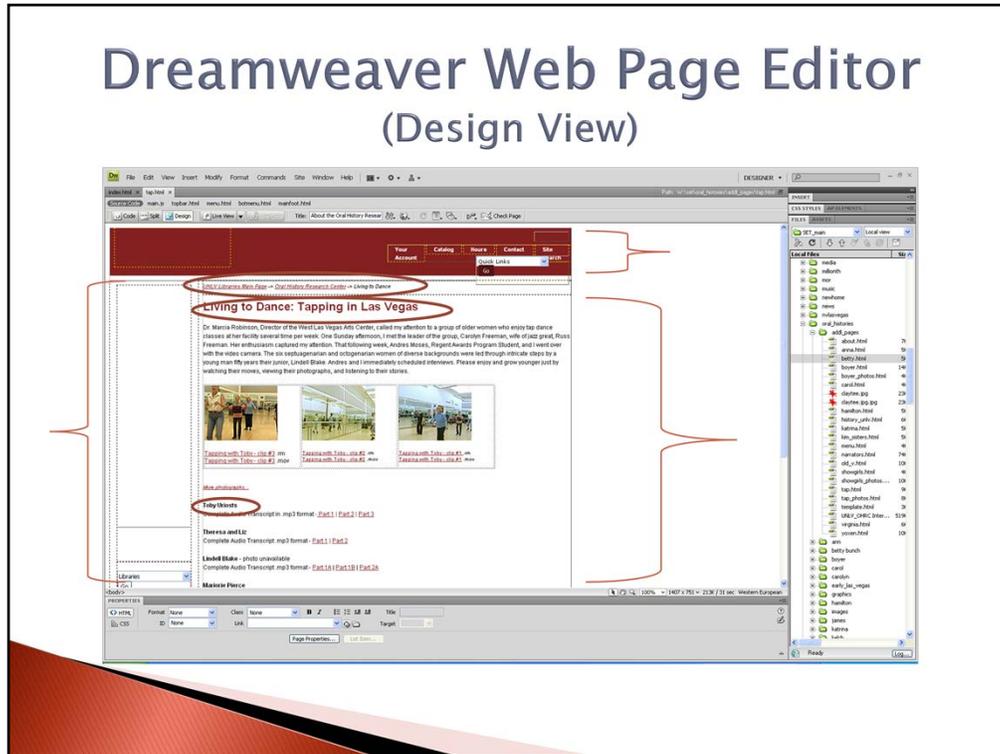
This pane is where you will also set up your web page's design. Designing a web page is not only important, but can be fun. It is where you set up the look and feel of a website. You should focus on **page length (click), fonts (click), headings & subheadings (click), banners (click), breadcrumbs trails (click), and navigation bars (click).**

Basic Steps to Creating an
Oral History Center Website

▸ Web Editor (Dreamweaver)
▸ PDF Files of your Transcripts

Transcripts are the backbone of your oral history center. However, HTML files (i.e., web pages) can't maintain all of the original formatting of your transcripts which can be saved in documents like a Word file. When you copy and paste your text from a Word file to the web page it's format can be a little off. If you want to provide access to your transcripts, then it is suggested that you save it in a better format for presentation purposes. **(click)** That is where Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) becomes useful to you. PDF documents maintain the look of the original document (i.e., your transcript saved as a Word document).

PDF Files of Your Transcripts
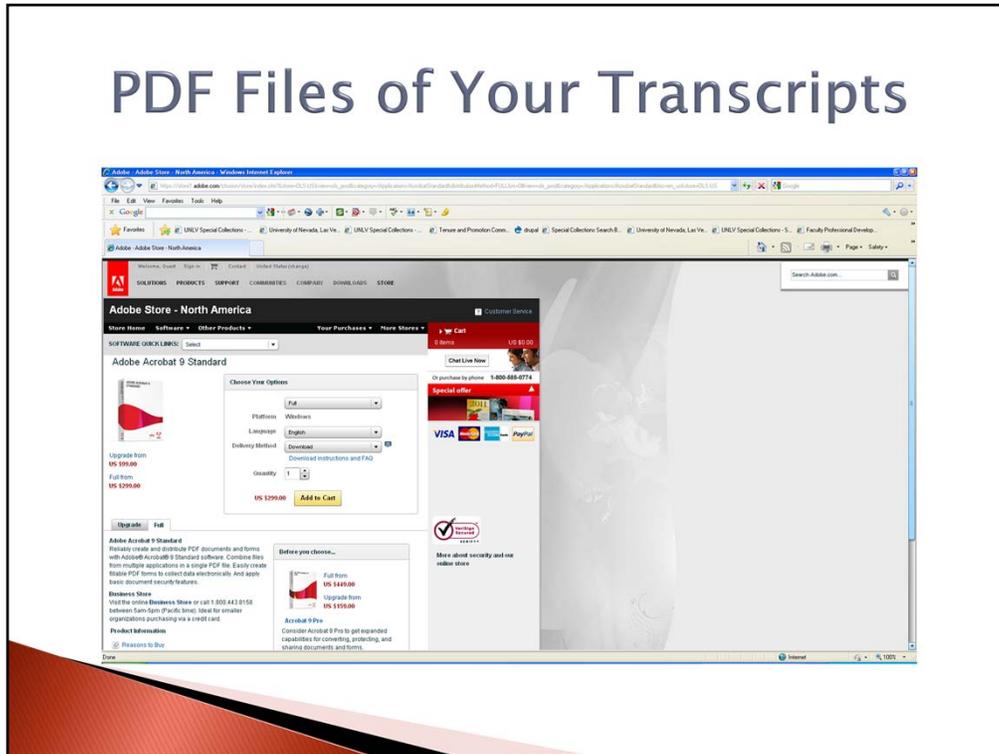
One needs to first save the documents in the PDF format. You will need to purchase Adobe Acrobat software in order to accomplish this task. This could cost you as much as $299.00 on the Adobe website. This software converts your original document to a PDF file.

PDF Files of Your Transcripts

Next, the visitor to your site needs to have Adobe Reader software on their pc in order to open and read your saved PDF file. This software is free and can be downloaded to a pc from the Adobe website, as well.

PDF files of Your Transcripts
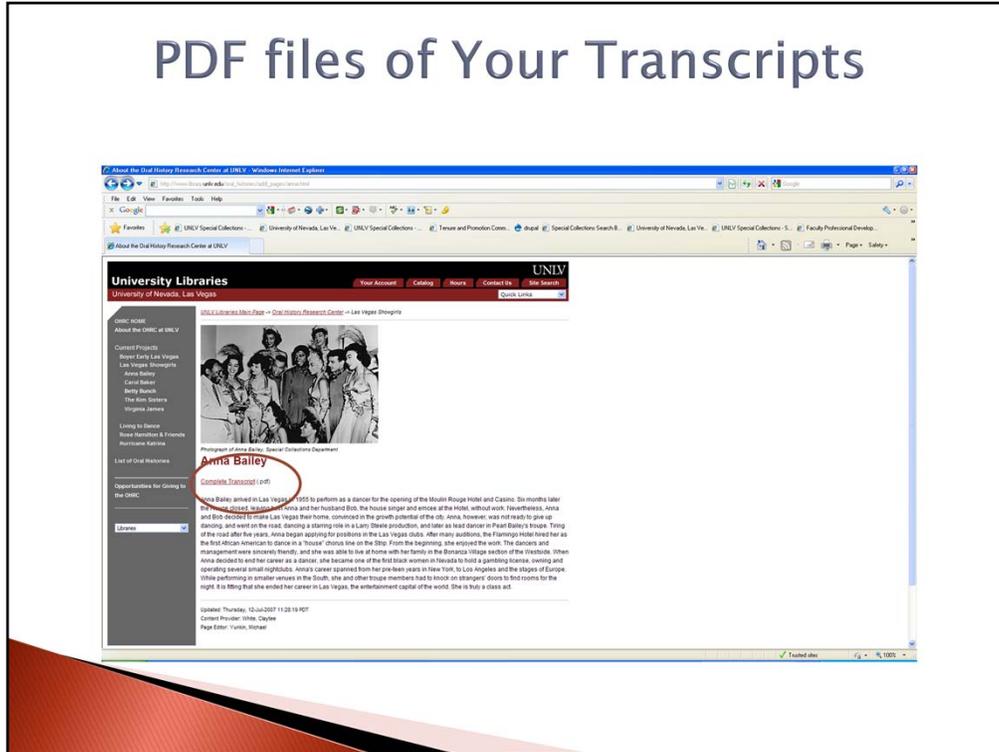
Now, one can open and read your transcripts saved as PDF files from your website. **(click)**

PDF Files of Your Transcripts
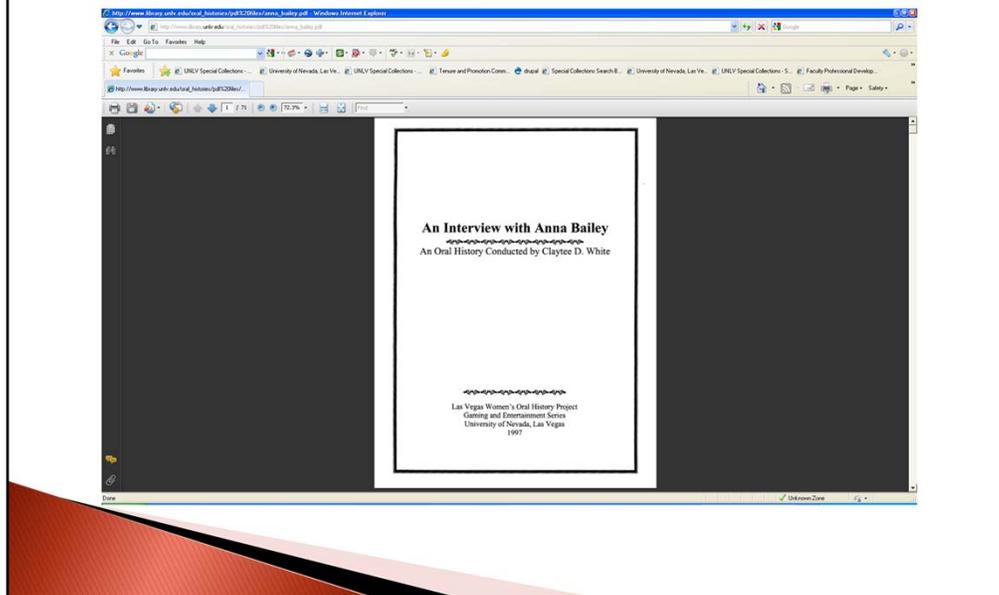
The transcript looks just as it did when you originally wrote it.

Basic Steps to Creating an Oral History Center Website

‣ Web Editor (Dreamweaver)
‣ PDF Files of Your Transcripts
‣ Digital Audio and Video files
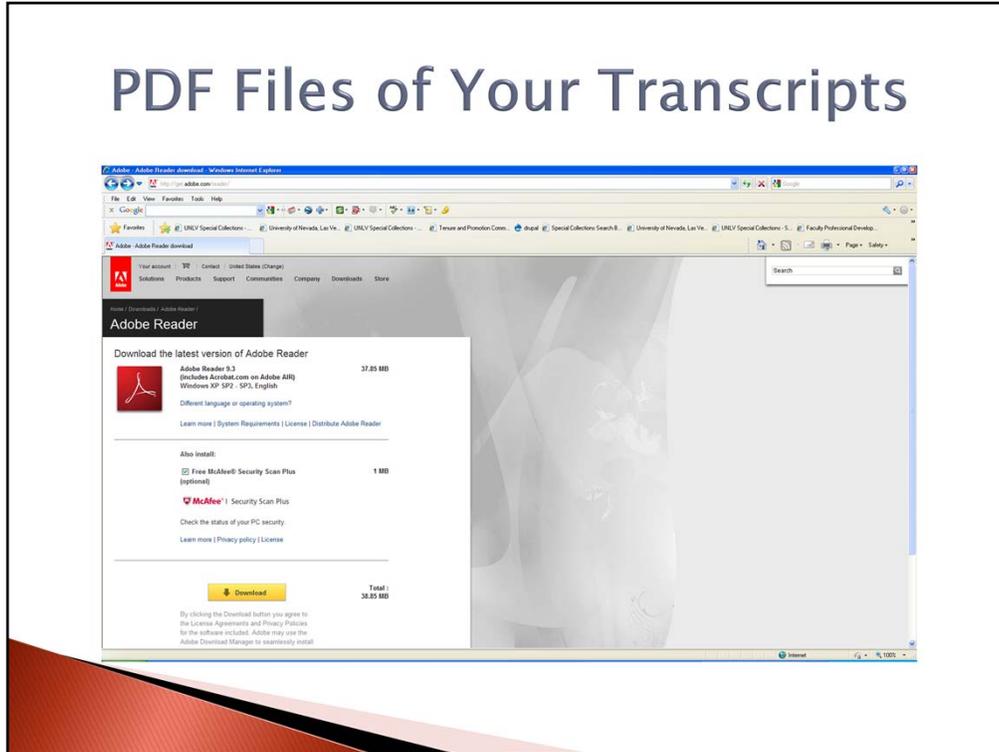
More and more oral history centers are adding their audio and video recordings to their websites now. **(click)** Patrons can now enjoy the actual voices and images of the interviewer. The providing of the audio and video is a nice new layer of access to your interviews.
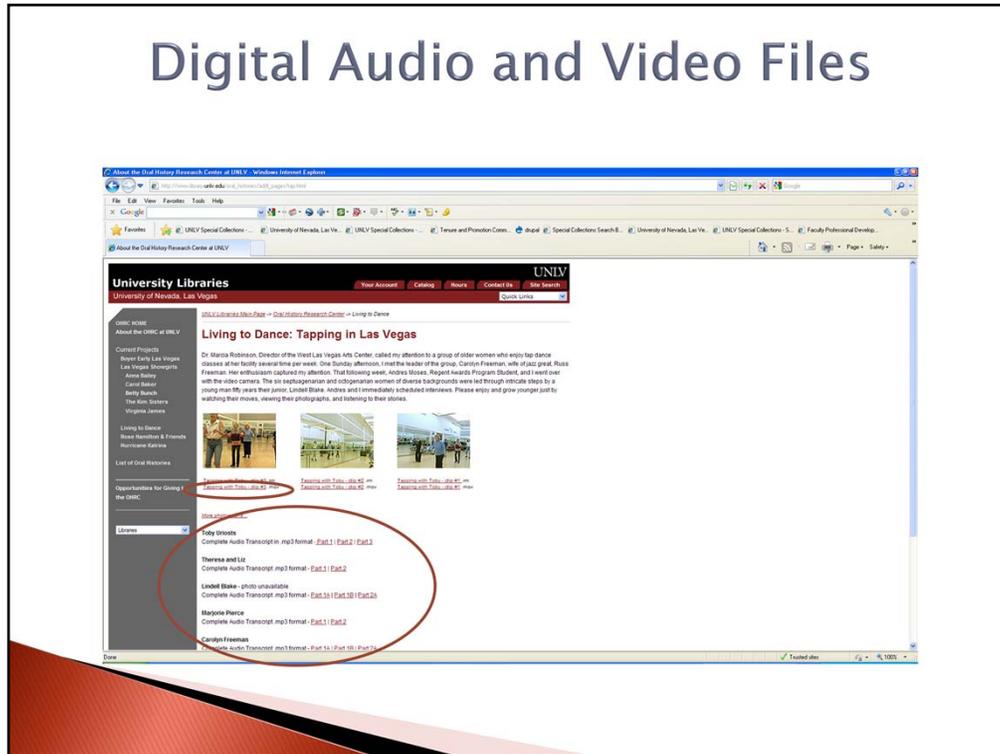
MP3 files are the best and most simple way to save an **audio file**. There are digital recorders that will capture an interview in this audio file format. MP3, stands for "MPEG-1, audio layer 3," and is a form of digital audio compression that reduces the size of audio files. MP3 files are therefore smaller & easier to transfer across the Internet and be stored on portable players. Here you see the UNLV Oral History Research Center's use of the MP3 file format. **(click)**

Some oral history research centers go as far as providing **videos of their interviews**. One needs only a digital video camera and a wire in which to connect to your pc in order to place video files on a website. **(click)** Here, you see that **MOV** is the video format chosen to showcase videos on this particular web page. It's the Apple QuickTime Movie file format and is supported by operating systems like Windows 95/98/2000/NT/XP, Mac OS Classic and X.

Apple QuickTime Movie File Format
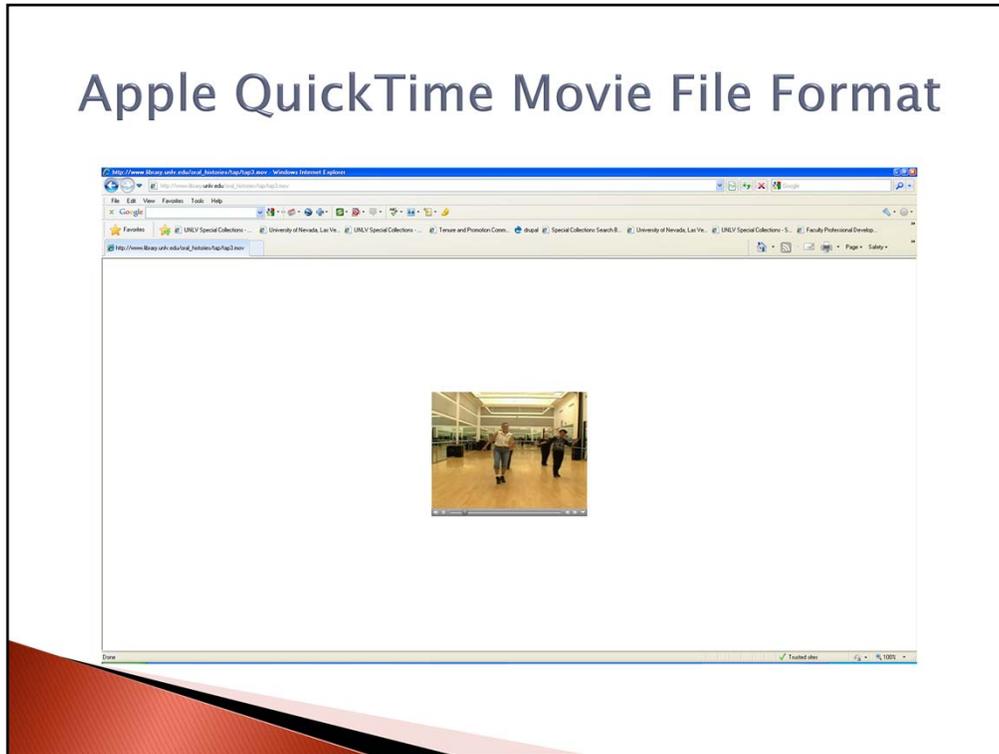
You just click on the link and your pc's Apple QuickTime media player launches to play the video interview.

Basic Steps to Creating an Oral History Center Website

▸ Web Editor (Dreamweaver)
▸ PDF Files of Your Transcripts
▸ Digital Audio and Video files
▸ Coordinating with Your IT Department.

If you work with an institution, then you need to find out their steps to uploading your html files to the web. **(click)** Each institution has their own way of getting your files live on the web.

Coordinating with Your IT Department
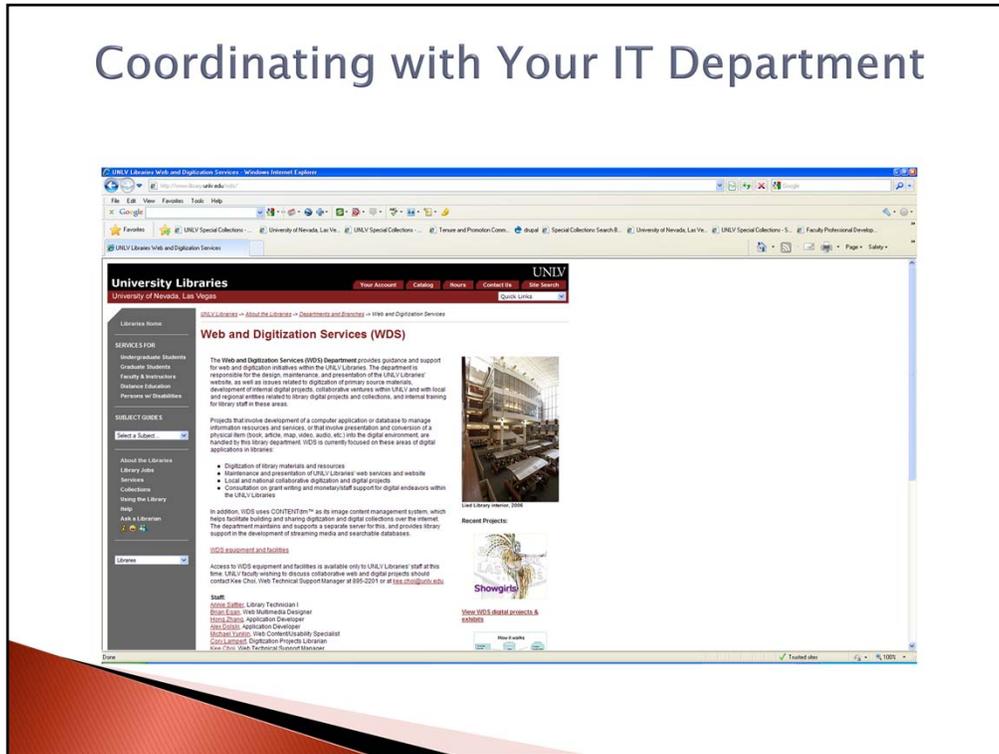
For example, their may be a person who acts as a gate keeper so as to make sure your design and content conforms to the web style guide of the organization. The UNLV Oral History Research Center must coordinate with a Web and Digitization department in order to get it's web files onto the Internet.

Basic Steps to Creating an Oral History Center Website

▸ Web Editor (Dreamweaver)
▸ PDF Files of Your Transcripts
▸ Digital Audio and Video files
▸ Coordinating with Your IT Department
▸ Free Websites

(click) If you are not working within an institution, then locating a free website service for your organization would be the next best choice of creating and maintaining web pages.

Free Websites
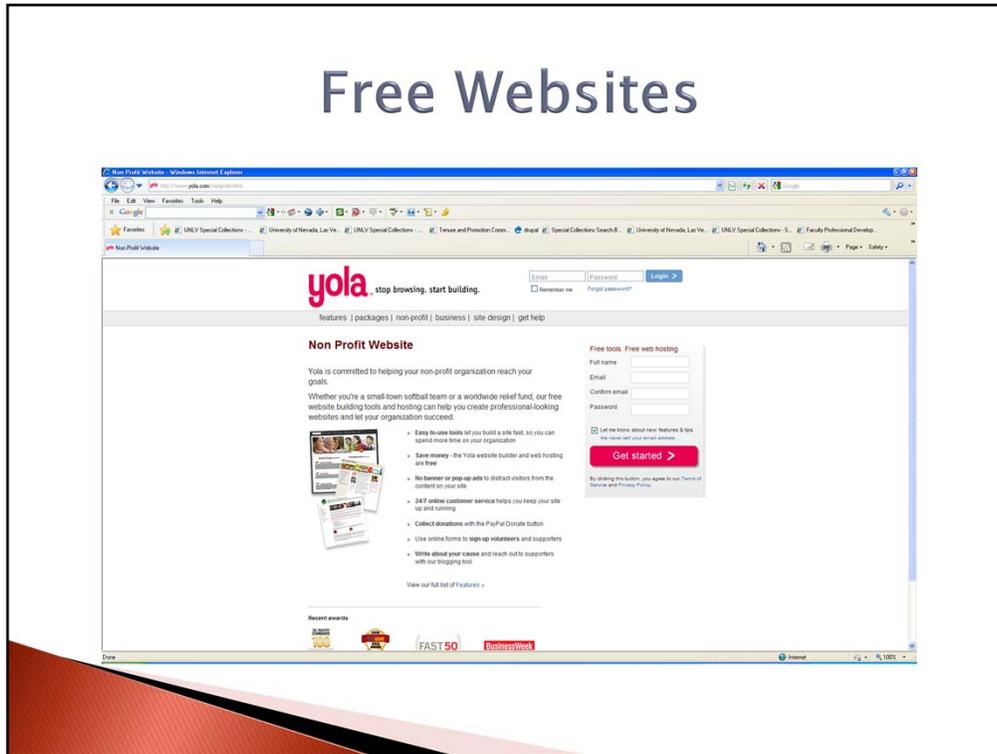
Yola (**yola.com**) is an example of a free website that provides non-profits easy to use tools to create their very own site. Some of the free features one can receive from Yola include a website builder, templates, and 24/7 online customer support. The hosting of this site is free and non-profits can even collect donations with a PayPal Donate button on their site. You can use online forms to sign up volunteers and supporters, too. Adding content and updating your site is easy. Also, one can pay $49.99 a year for a Yola Pro package that features 5GB of storage space. This is something to consider when you are uploading a lot of audio and video files. Therefore, Yola is a nice example of a free website for workers of private oral history projects.

Conclusion
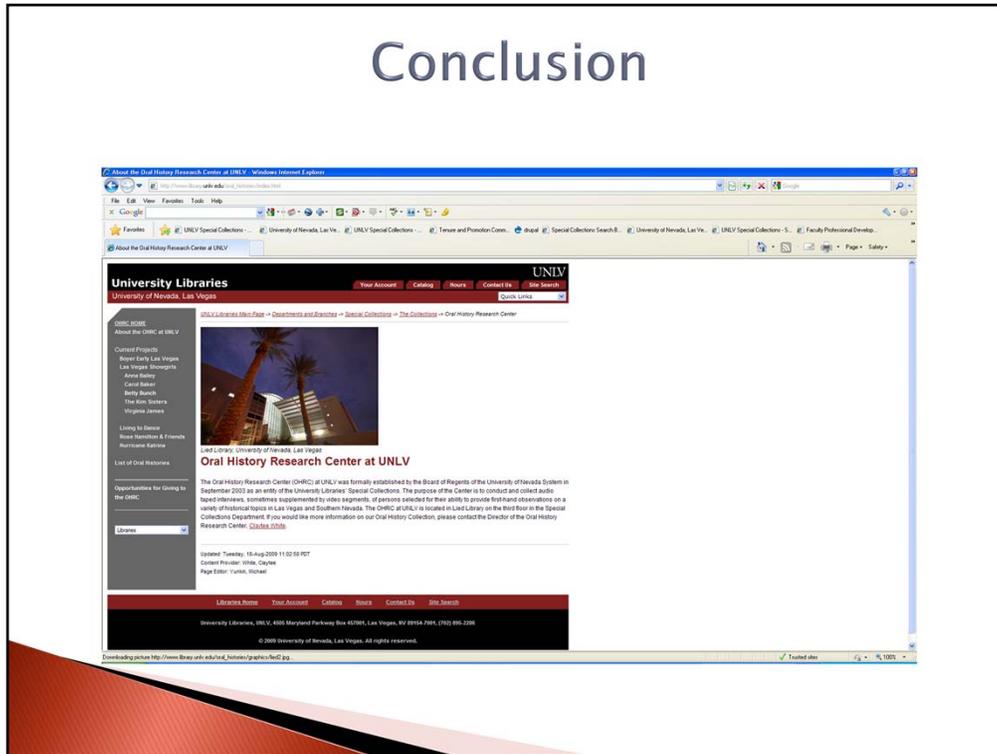
In conclusion, we have seen a snap shot of oral history websites on the web. Specifically, the site H-Oralhist is a nice resource for researchers of oral history center sites on the web. It was created by the Oral History Association and the Humanities and Social Sciences Online. Some of the common features among the sites listed here included access to inventories, audio & video files, and transcripts. The UNLV Oral History Research Center contains a lot of these same features which makes it a nice template for your own site. The next generation in access to oral history materials comes from the Nevada Test Site Oral History Project. It is a digital collection based on a ContentDM database. It makes it easier and quicker to search for your transcripts, audio and video files. Lastly, creating a basic oral history center website can be fairly easy. We were able to go over the various steps and necessary software to create a website for beginners. On the other hand, Yola is a quick and free way to get a website up and running for private oral history center.

Oral History Centers are evolving. Today we can see that evolution on the Internet. Researchers now have access to an incredible amount of historical information. Large and small oral history research centers play an important role in this changing digital environment. An environment that provides access to the recorded history of the American Southwest.