

October 15, 2021

Ms. Diane Proctor, Chair
Community Preservation Committee
c/o Planning and Land Management
141 Keyes Road
Concord, MA 01742

Dear Ms. Proctor and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Concord Historical Commission, I am writing in support of the grant application from Anke Voss, Special Collections Curator of the Concord Free Public Library. Ms. Voss seeks funds to digitize and transcribe approximately 341 oral history cassettes that record the personal stories of Concordians over a period of nearly 50 years. The Oral History program of Concord was established by the Historical Commission in 1976 and over the years has generally been overseen by a partnership between the Commission and the Library with modest funding provided by the Town of Concord.

Oral histories have been described as “the first kind of history.” Recorded remembrances may serve as the only description of a certain event, person or place and help us better understand how an individual or a community experienced events of the past.

The 341 cassettes held in Special Collections include recollections from historian Doris Kearns Goodwin; her husband and speechwriter for President John F. Kennedy, Richard Goodwin; and Herb Wilkins, former Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts. But they also include stories from returning veterans of the Persian Gulf War and reflections by Tama and Jiro Ishihara, long time Concord residents who were held in the Japanese internment camps during World War II. When the US government finally acknowledged the grievous harm done to these American citizens and awarded them a financial settlement, the Ishiharas donated their funds to the Concord schools’ scholarship program.

Although professionally maintained over the years, these tapes have become fragile, and their technology is dated. There is genuine concern that their physical state may deteriorate to the point that these stories which document personal historical experiences may be lost forever. Digitization is a proven method that can preserve them and make them accessible to the public

The Concord Historical Commission strongly encourages the members of the Community Preservation Committee to support this grant request from the Concord Free Public Library.

Sincerely,

Melissa C. Saalfield, Chair
Concord Historical Commission