Digital oral history: Using the Web to give history new life

Ellen Dubinsky

Barbara Halbrook

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wustl.edu/becker_pubs

Part of the Medicine and Health Sciences Commons

Recommended Citation

https://digitalcommons.wustl.edu/becker_pubs/8
Between 1959 and 1985, Becker Medical Library recorded more than 50 oral histories of Washington University’s faculty on reel-to-reel audiotape. Although the audiotapes were transcribed, nothing else was done with them and the oral histories were essentially forgotten—hidden away in archival boxes. During the past year, the oral histories have been digitized and presented, with their transcripts, on the Web. Being able to hear the voices and see pictures of the interviewees has given new life to Becker Library’s oral historical materials and led to new interest in medical history in oral format.

Conversion of analog resources into digital resources:
- Provides increased access
- Allows universal distribution using Real Player, Windows Media Player, or QuickTime
- Preserves your unique resources in a mutable format

Interviewees include:
- Medical librarian Estelle Brodman
- Nobel Laureate Carl Cori
- Nobel Laureate Joseph Erlanger
- Nobel Laureate Daniel Nathans
- Brigadier General Crawford F. Sams

Considerations:
- Cost in time and money – Transcription is time-consuming
- Word-for-word transcription – How essential is verbatim transcription?
- Copyright, permissions, privacy issues

Future Enhancements:
- Add new oral history interviews
- Add videotaped interviews
- Make audio podcasts available
- Add search functionality
- Further linking to related resources

Results:
Interest in the history of Medicine is growing at Washington University. Since this project started, six new interviews have been conducted. Three more are scheduled, and at least five more prospective interviews are being negotiated.