Columbia University Libraries Launches “Notable New Yorkers” Oral History Web Site


“Notable New Yorkers” (available at http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/nny/) offers digital audio recordings and transcripts of interviews drawn from the rich collections of the Libraries’ Oral History Research Office. These interviews, conducted by the Office between 1955 and 2001, open an imaginative window onto twentieth-century New York City and the ways in which it has deeply affected the culture and history of the United States and the world beyond. With three background essays and a briefer methodological introduction for each oral history, this site also provides a revealing look at the art of the biographical interview—a methodology developed by the Office over its four and a half decades of existence—in which individuals who have shaped history reflect upon their lives and accomplishments.

“The opening of this living portal into our collections marks the transition from the manuscript archive of the 20th century to the digital archive of the 21st century,” said Mary Marshall Clark, Director of the Oral History Research Office. “It will enable countless new researchers to probe these eye-witness accounts of history in the making more deeply and directly than ever before.”

Included in the web site are full-text transcriptions along with the original audio recordings of interviews with the publisher and television personality Bennett Cerf, African American psychologists and educators Kenneth Clark and Mamie Clark, labor activist Moe Foner, publisher and philanthropist Andrew Heiskell, former New York City mayor Edward I. Koch, health advocate and philanthropist Mary Lasker, New York Times editor and columnist John B. Oakes, former Secretary of the United States Department of Labor Frances Perkins, and media executive Dr. Frank Stanton. In all, there are approximately 180 hours of streaming audio and over 12,000 pages of edited transcriptions, representing almost 200 individual interview sessions. The site also includes biographical sketches and photographs of the interview subjects, as well as indexes and tables of contents to the material. The texts of the transcriptions are fully searchable.

“Making the treasures of the Columbia University’s Oral History Research Office available online will have momentous implications for historical research, given the wide scope of its collection and the long leadership role that it has played in the development of oral history, nationally and internationally,” said Donald A. Richie, U. S. Senate Oral Historian and author of Doing Oral History (Oxford, 2003).
The web site was created as joint project of the Libraries Oral History Research Office and Libraries Digital Program Division. Columbia’s Digital Knowledge Ventures (DKV) provided site design, programming and consulting services.

**Columbia University Libraries** is one of the top ten academic library systems in the nation, with 9.2 million volumes, over 65,650 serials, as well as extensive collections of electronic resources, manuscripts, rare books, microforms, and other nonprint formats. The collections and services are organized into 25 libraries, supporting specific academic or professional disciplines. Columbia Libraries employs more than 400 professional and support staff to assist faculty, students, and researchers in their academic endeavors. The Library’s web site at http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/ is a gateway to its print and electronic collections and to its services.

**The Columbia University Oral History Research Office** is the oldest and one of the largest organized university-based oral history programs open to the public in the world. Founded in 1948 by Pulitzer Prize winning historian Allan Nevins, the oral history collection now contains nearly 8,000 taped memoirs, and nearly 1,000,000 pages of transcript. The program is also a center for teaching and research, offering opportunities for students, visiting scholars and fellows. The Office’s web site is located at: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/oral/index.html

**The Columbia Libraries Digital Program Division** works to improve the coordination and effectiveness of Columbia’s library-related digital initiatives. Currently staffed by eight full-time employees, its scope includes the development and support of the Libraries official public and staff websites; development of enhanced interfaces and tools for the Columbia community’s use of databases, e-journals and other e-resources; coordination of internal and external collection digitization and web-publishing programs; and implementation and management of Columbia’s institutional repository programs, including Columbia Image Bank and DigitalCommons@Columbia. The Division’s website can be found at: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/inside/units/ldpd/

**Digital Knowledge Ventures** is a multimedia design and development group created by Columbia University to provide services to clients on campus as well as to organizations outside the University. Their services include conference publishing, interactive kiosks, web site development, online publications, e-learning curricula, as well as the development of collections, directories, and collaborative tools. DKV’s external clients include a host of educational and not-for-profit enterprises, and many of the University’s departments, divisions, centers, and institutes are among their internal clients. DKV’s web site is located at: http://www.dkv.columbia.edu/index.html

---END---