

12-2002

A Library Oral History Project at Whitworth College

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Recommended Citation

Hauck, Janet. "A Library Oral History Project at Whitworth College." *Alki* 18, no. 3 (2002): 8-9.

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JANET HAUCK
**A Library
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Despite prejudice aimed at Japanese-Americans by wartime society, Whitworth's Japanese-American students participated fully in campus activities at the Presbyterian college.
Top: Members of the Alpha Kappa Chi sorority, photographed in 1944. **Bottom:** Japanese-American members of the 1943-44 men's basketball team.

Enryo. In Japanese, the phrase means, "I'm not worthy to be asked; I don't know enough; there are others who know more." According to a Japanese-American colleague, *enryo* was the word for what the elderly gentleman had been trying to convey, as I struggled to convince him of the importance of his story for my oral history project. I thought the man, whom I'll call Mr. K., would leap at the chance to tell his story, yet he had responded in a way that caught me off guard. But why was I so interested in gaining an interview with this man? And how had I gotten involved with an oral history project in the first place? By way of explanation, let me go back a few steps and fill in the details.

When I was hired as the archivist at Whitworth College three years ago, I came with a master's degree in library science and ten years of previous experience as an academic reference librarian. I also arrived with a recommendation from my former employer that went something like this: "Whatever she doesn't know about archives, she'll pick up quickly!" Needless to say, I was grateful for the faith placed in me, and I have taken advantage of every opportunity to learn what it means to operate a college archives. Of course, it has helped that the college's archival collection is located within Whitworth's library. About half the archivists I know have had specific training in history and archival work. The other half of us with library degrees most likely learn on the job, as I have.

Operating an archives has turned out to be a natural extension of all the things I enjoyed about reference work, and about library work in general. I am involved daily with the information needs of my users: students, faculty, and administration of the college, as well as visiting researchers. I work often with students whose papers are "due tomorrow." The main difference that I've seen in archival work involves the type of resources my users are seeking—primary source materials, mainly manuscript collections. Though these materials are arranged and classified differently than a traditional book collection, they are still used to answer questions and meet research needs.

I do much of the selection and acquisition of materials for the two distinct collections in the archives. The general collection on college history is made up of publications and records that are either sent to me by the offices and departments on campus, or that I rout out of various campus vaults, closets, and storage rooms. The second collection is the Pacific Northwest Protestant History Collection, which I was hired to start and to develop. This collection has now grown to include the historical records of over twenty local Protestant churches and organizations. Maintaining and building these collections requires a lot of very different activities. For the past year, I have been actively collecting the oral histories of many

Janet Hauck is an archivist at Whitworth College. Photos courtesy of Janet Hauck.

of the college's alumni, one of which was my elderly Japanese-American gentleman.

"I was only in the internment camp for a very short time," Mr. K. told me, "and then I was sponsored out through the work of the Student Relocation Council. You won't want to waste your time interviewing me; you'll want to interview people who spent a much longer time there." Enryo.

I knew about the National Japanese-American Student Relocation Council of 1942, because of preliminary research I had done when applying for a grant late last year. The Washington Civil Liberties Public Education Program of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) offered grants to carry out projects that focused on the Japanese-American internment camp experience during World War II. Whitworth had had a significant Japanese-American student population during that period, and I proposed to document oral histories from this group. I felt that stories like theirs had not been well-represented in the literature, and apparently OSPI agreed, because I was awarded a grant for the 2002-2003 school year.

Mr. K.'s story was exactly what I wanted for my project, but how could I convince him of that? Enter my project assistant, who was hired with part of the grant money, and trained by me to carry out most of the interviews. She and I, with our newly gained knowledge of enryo, composed a carefully worded letter designed to persuade Mr. K. to grant us an interview. My Japanese-American colleague warned us that it might take several tries to convince him. A day later, my assistant excitedly told me that Mr. K. had called and scheduled his interview for the next morning. Finally, success!

I have to smile about all those people who've said they don't see how I can enjoy working in a dusty back room with musty old stuff. When I think about how much time I am able to spend working with people, I realize that I really have the best of two worlds. At any given time, I could be processing a collection of historical records and making a rare and interesting find. I supervise volunteers, train student interns and project assistants, and instruct users in archival research. I advocate for the archives with faculty and administration, speak to groups interested in the history of the college, and network with other archivists. I teach students to do oral history interviews, attend conferences, and engage in continuing education. And I write grant proposals.

My interest in recording Japanese-American oral histories grew out of a desire to build the oral history collection of the Whitworth archives and to fill in gaps in the literature. This meshed with OSPI's goal for this project, which is to educate school children in our communities regarding civil rights violations and how to avoid them in the future. Making such people as Mr. K. come alive to students will help them understand that discrimination should not be repeated. To that end, we'll use part of the grant money to produce a CD-ROM containing edited portions of the interviews, which will be distributed to schools for use in the classroom. And because of people like Mr. K., students will be able to hear stories that need to be heard.

Participants in the oral history project: Tom and Heidi Kitayama, with inset of Heidi as Whitworth's May Day princess in 1945 (as Heidi Horikawa), Sumio Matsumoto (bottom right), and Seiko Edamatsu (bottom left).



The tape recorder was running. "My mother was so worried about us being in the internment camp. She said 'We're going to go to waste here.' So she approached Father T. (our priest in Seattle), and Father T. had the president of Gonzaga University sponsor me. So I was allowed to leave to attend Gonzaga University. I was on probation. Every month I had to go down to the police station and get an 'OK' slip for the president... (When my parents got out of camp, they bought a house near Whitworth College, so I came to school here)...It was the beginning of a different lifestyle for me. We were always taught to make the best of what was offered us. I have no complaints..."

Thank you, Mr. K. The story you have shared with us will become a new primary source document for students and future researchers. They will be able to learn more about the college's history, our nation's history, and also more about what it means to be human. Neither an archivist nor a librarian could ask for more.