

Digitizing oral history

Since 1971, the Jewish Historical Society of British Columbia, led by Cyril Leonoff and Irene Dodek, has been conducting oral history interviews to ensure that personal histories are collected and preserved for posterity. These interviews are catalogued and indexed, then made available for researchers.

The first interview took place in 1968, with Leonoff interviewing Ben Barish. To date, JHSBC has recorded more than 700 oral history interviews, approximately 3,000 hours, the largest oral history collection of any other Jewish museum, archives or historical society in Canada.

JHSBC has interviewed a diverse group of Jewish and non-Jewish pioneers that have shaped the province and those who continue to build it, including Muni Evers, Nathan Nemetz, Jack Diamond, Irving Snider, Joseph Segal, Simma Holt and Grace McCarthy. JHSBC also interviews people from Jewish communities outside of the Lower Mainland – Nelson, Trail, Rossland, Okanagan Valley, Fraser Valley, Barkerville, Prince George and, recently, Vancouver and Bowen islands.

About 500 of the oldest oral history interviews were recorded on audiocassette and professional standards recommend that magnetic media tape be converted to a digital format before the content is lost. To preserve this vital collection, JHSBC has begun a six-month-long project of digitizing 300 of its oldest oral history interviews, with support from the Irving K. Barber B.C. History Digitization Program. Excerpts from the interviews will be made available online at the completion of the project.

To hear excerpts from the collection, visit jewishmuseum.ca/oral-histories. For more information, contact Jennifer Yuhasz, JHSBC archivist, at 604-257-5199. ♫

– *Courtesy of Jewish Museum and Archives of British Columbia*