One of my sons’ favorite shows is “Myth Busters.” This series follows the efforts of its cast as they use “basic elements of the scientific method to test the validity of various rumors, myths, movie scenes, internet videos and news stories in popular culture.” (Wikipedia), Myth Busters, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myth_busters. Accessed 11/30/2009). Recently, the Archives received a research request which made me think of this program. As with the show, the Archives’ staff uses scientific research methodology (or library science) to find the validity of rumors and answer unanswered questions. Our request concerned the McAlister Chair of Medicine. Tradition has it that, shortly after the chair was established, the donor was planning a visit to Durham. The donor contacted Dr. Wilbert C. Davison, first dean of the School of Medicine, and asked if they could come to see the chair they had endowed. Dr. Davison, acting quickly, contacted a local furniture maker and had a suitable chair built. Thus began our efforts into discovering the history of the chair, its endower, its namesake, and the people who have held the chair.

Our first stop was the Department of Medicine records where we discovered a short statement that Dr. Eugene Stead had typed in 1980. Dr. Stead’s recollection gives the basic story of the chair: endowed in 1930, held by Dr. Frederic M. Hanes from 1930-1947, then by Dr. Stead from 1947-1979, and then by Dr. Roscoe Robinson from 1979. The chair was endowed by Florence McAlister’s sister, and the physical chair was built a few years after its endowment after Ms. McAlister’s sister called Dean Davison to say she would like to visit in order to see the chair. From its endowment though 1967, the chair had resided in the office of the chairman of the Department of Medicine. In 1967, when Dr. Stead left the chairmanship, he took the chair to his new office where it was to remain until he left Duke. At that time, the chair was to go to Dr. Robinson.

The story itself had been validated by a documented source. Still, we had no information on Florence McAlister, her sister, their connection to Duke, or why the endowment had been established in the first place. The introduction of Distinguished Professors of Duke University, states that the Florence McAlister Professorship of Medicine was established in 1936 (not 1930 as Dr. Stead stated) by her sister Mrs. Amelie McAlister Uphsur in memory of her sister. Now that we had two names, our next step was to visit Ancestry.com. Using the website’s search function, which allows you to search for an individual and narrow results by associated family members, we
Honoring Dr. Ivan Brown

Dr. Ivan Brown, Pathology staff 1941 and (right) at a special lecture for History of Medicine in 2008.

The recent death of Dr. Ivan Brown, former James B. Duke Professor of Surgery at Duke, gives us pause to reflect on the life of this remarkable man and to highlight some of the ways in which the Archives has been able to preserve his legacy.

Dr. Brown was, among his many accomplishments, a gifted surgeon, a captain in the Duke's 65th General Hospital unit that served overseas during World War II, and a visionary thinker who designed a blood heat exchanger used during cardiopulmonary bypass surgery.

In March of 2007, I was fortunate enough to travel to Lakeland, Florida to visit Dr. Brown and spend time interviewing him. The result is approximately eleven hours of recorded conversation about Dr. Brown's own work and about his memories of the Duke medical community in which he served. The stories Dr. Brown tells in these interviews are characteristically witty and self-effacing, as Dr. Brown preferred to talk more about the humorous characteristics and important contributions of others rather than the details of his own shining reputation. Dr. Brown's stories of Dr. Wilburt Davison, Dr. George Eadie, Dr. Josiah Trent, and others reveal his keen memory and his love of a good tale. Dr. Brown wished that his recollections in these interviews be sealed until 2010, as he had been writing an anecdotal history of Duke Medicine and wanted the stories he told to come forth first in that narrative. As of January 2010, these interviews are now unsealed. Selected sound clips will soon be made available on the Archives website as a tribute to Dr. Brown.

Other archival materials related to the life of Dr. Brown include the Ivan Brown Papers, the 65th General Hospital Collection, audiovisual materials from the 65th General Hospital unit, a video of Dr. Brown giving a speech, and a biographical file of Dr. Brown.

Blood heat exchanger controls the temperature of the blood outside of the body during open-heart surgery

“...being a blood banker, maybe I was thinking more kindly to the blood than other people had... Anyway, that’s how the heat exchanger evolved. It was a very simple thing...It’s still one that is used almost with every heart-lung machine that is still in use.”

-Ivan Brown

Think fast!
Can you answer the following questions?
Dawne Lucas, Head of Technical Services

Who was Baker House named after?

In what year was Wilburt C. Davison elected Dean of the Duke University School of Medicine and Hospital?

How many women were selected to be in the first class of medical students?

Would today’s medical students know the difference?

The answers, all documented here at the Duke University Medical Center Archives, are:

Bessie Baker, 1927, and four.
From the Director’s Chair
(cont. from p. 1)

were able to find the McAlister sisters living in New York in 1900 with their parents, William H. and Armanitime R. McAlister. William H. McAlister was listed as being an executive with the American Tobacco Company. Finally, the connection to the Duke family and Duke University.

Our final step was to contact the University Archives. A search of their site had indicated that their records held information on the McAlister endowment as established by Amelie M. Upshur. These records proved to be very informative in answering our last few questions. Why? And since we had two different dates, when? According to correspondence, Florence McAlister died some years prior to 1935. After inheriting the estates of her mother, father, and sister, Mrs. Upshur desired to make an endowment in memory of her sister. On December 29, 1936, the Florence McAlister Chair of Medicine was established.

By using the records contained in three archival repositories, our staff was able to confirm oral tradition through a written account, and to determine an exact date and intent behind the establishment of a named endowment. While this is just one example of the type of questions we receive and the methodology we employ in seeking the answer, the Archives is a wealth of information on the history, administration, and growth of Duke Medicine. To ensure that future generations of researchers have access to your stories, please feel free to contact our staff to discuss the possible donation of your materials.

Think fast! (cont. from p. 2)

What may seem like routine facts today might not be so decades into the future. When individuals contact the Archives with reference questions, we consult our collections to look for the answers. Sadly, sometimes we are unable to find conclusive, satisfactory answers because we do not have the necessary documentation. In many cases departments and individuals throw such documentation away instead of sending it to the Archives because they do not consider it valuable. Although it is true that the Archives only accepts certain types of records, called “records of enduring value”. It is always a good idea to err on the side of caution and contact the Archives for a consultation before throwing away documents that might have historical value. When in doubt, seek us out!


PA History Center Update
Leila Ledbetter, PAHx Director & Archivist

PAEA Conference – Portland, OR

This past November I attended the PAEA (Physician Assistant Education Association) conference in order to represent the PA History Center to one of our primary audiences, PA education programs. Part of the PA program accreditation process requires that each class is taught some of the history and development of the profession. The History Center makes available resources such as photographs, oral histories, articles and primary documents to educators around the country so that they can teach a rich and interesting class. With our presence at the conference, we hoped to remind the programs that we are available to them as a resource and also allow educators to give us feedback about what kind of resources they find useful.

Also at the conference, the Society for the Preservation of PA History hosted a two-part presentation. The first part was a discussion of the early days of the Association of Physician Assistant Programs, which became the PAEA, by the first two presidents of APAP, Drs. Alfred Sadler and Thomas Piemme. They provided a fascinating insight into the climate in the medical world as the Physician Assistant profession was attempting to grow, expand and establish itself. If you are interested in learning more, the PA History Center has both a recording and transcript of the talk available.

The second part of the presentation was entitled “Preparing a Historical Display for Your PA Program: Lessons Learned,” which was conducted by myself and Rea Katz, MS, PA-C, Associate Professor at Rosalind Franklin University. Ms. Katz recently put together an extensive historical display for PA Week at her university and contacted the PA History Center for help. Together we learned a lot about the importance of collecting the history of individual PA programs. We also discussed what resources were available for her to use from the History Center. A large portion of the discussion was devoted to the practical steps involved in putting together an exhibit, from dealing with copyright issues to technological considerations.

New Resources

The PA History Center is proud to unveil the new PAHx History Center Database (http://pahx.pastperfect-online.com), which allows users to search the extensive collection of historical and current PA literature that we have available in the Prentiss Harrison Resource and Reading Room.

People who are interested in seeing the Eugene A. Stead Lake House Office Museum can now view many of the interesting artifacts and photos online with our new Virtual Exhibit: http://pahx.org/virtualexhibit.htm

To see these collections in person, please contact leila.ledbetter@duke.edu
Our newsletter is now available online!

If you’re interested in receiving email notification when a new issue is released, please visit our website (http://archives.mc.duke.edu/newsletters/newsletters.html) to sign up, or email us at: dumcarchives@duke.edu.

Currently, the Archives is gearing up for the School of Nursing Reunion Weekend, where we will once again present an exhibit on April 16th. Please stop by and see us there!

In February the DUMC Library and Archives partnered with the John Hope Franklin Center to present our fifth Tea with Trailblazers event. MaryAnn Black was this year’s featured Tea speaker.

If you would like to learn more about our events or exhibits, if you have suggestions for future projects, or ideas for utilizing the Archives’ wealth of resources, please contact Adonna Thompson at, adonna.thompson@duke.edu.

New! in Oral History

Katie Adams Hodge
Graduate of the Duke School of Nursing, BSN, 1943; instructor in the School of Nursing through 1947. Interview about history of Davison Club.

Raymond “Bucky” Waters
Vice Chancellor Emeritus for Development at Duke University Medical Center; former executive director of the Davison Club.

Anna Painter
1948 graduate, Duke School of Nursing.

Dr. William Wilson
Professor Emeritus, Department of Psychiatry.

Dr. Dan Blazer
J.P. Gibbons Professor of Psychiatry and Professor, Community and Family Medicine.

Dr. Melvin Berlin
First medical team physician for the Duke athletic program.