

Voices from the past heard once more

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Senior student Candace Ross, left, works with Newcomb archivist Susan Tucker to bring the voices of the oral history project to the Web. (Photo by Jackson Hill)

Voices from the past are back at Tulane University as part of an oral history project to archive the stories and experiences of hundreds of alumnae and faculty members.

Recordings of past Newcomb College students are being painstakingly preserved in digital archives, creating both a record of the past and a way to share history beyond the confines of the university.

The [Newcomb Oral History Project](#) began in 1986. Those interviewed, like [Mary Lou Lanier Fife](#), class of 1930, recall stories of their classes, professors and social life, all while painting a picture of their experiences on campus and in the city of New Orleans.

“The memories of these women are evocative about so much,” said archivist Susan Tucker, a 1972 Newcomb College graduate. “They tell us how educated women thought of the paths they took in life.”

The efforts of staff and student interns at the Newcomb College Institute and longtime alumnae volunteers like Helen Schneidau, a 1967 Newcomb College graduate, have grown the collection to almost 300 recordings. The recordings have undergone full-scale digitization and scholars can now access them online.

Visiting scholar and public radio host Gwen Thompkins, a 1987 Newcomb College grad, began lending her talents to the project in 2014 to expand the scope of the collection.

Senior Candace Ross has spent months ensuring the women's voices are preserved. Using sophisticated software, the digitization process requires playing the recordings in real time, a procedure that takes hours. Most were recorded on audiocassettes, a delicate medium for such important histories.

Ross forged a strong connection with the women whose voices she heard.

“Digitizing the oral histories of over 200 alumnae has left me with a profound appreciation of these pioneering women. When I go to work in the Caroline Richardson Building, sit in a classroom in Newcomb Hall or go to my room in Warren, I remember the alumnae who have gone through those doors, sat in those classrooms and lived in my room,” Ross said.

To get involved with the Newcomb Oral History Project, contact [Gwen Thompkins](#).

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