

Why do oral history?

Two imperatives:

Experience of participants

History in the First Person

Documentation

Scholarship



Experience of the Participants

- **It is important to know about the people who shape the technologies.**

This information is interesting, motivational, and part of history.

- **Engineers are not especially vocal.**

Published articles and patents tell only part of the story.

The scientific and business context of work is often not documented.

The personal experience of the engineer is often not documented.



Documentation

- The distinction between history and journalism.
- The documentary tradition in history.



The History of Oral History

- Oral testimony has always been used in writing history.
- Because of the acceleration of history, there is more concern with recent events.
- There is greater interest in types of history for which documents are scarce.
- The inexpensive, portable tape-recorder became available in the 1960s.



Oral-History Activity

- Educational institutions
- Professional institutions
- Companies
- Individuals

- Oral-history organizations



Useful Collections in the United States

- Smithsonian Institution
- IEEE History Center
- Charles Babbage Institute

- Center for History of Physics (AIP)
- UC Berkeley Oral-History Program
- Rutgers WWII Oral-History Project
- ...

