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The History of Medicine Collection at Ruth Lilly Medical Library

By Brandon T. Pieczko, Ruth Lilly Medical Library, Indiana University School of Medicine

The History of Medicine Collection is a special collection unit within the Ruth Lilly Medical Library located on the campus of Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis. As part of the Indiana University School of Medicine—the largest MD-granting medical school in the United States by enrollment—the mission of the History of Medicine Collection is to support the research, learning, and educational success of Indiana University students, faculty, and community members by collecting, preserving, interpreting, and providing access to unique materials documenting the history of medicine; medical education, training, research, and practice; and health and disease treatment and prevention in the state of Indiana and beyond. The collection includes archival records and manuscripts from Indiana University School of Medicine faculty and alumni, researchers, professional organizations, advocates, and practitioners in the medical and health-care professions; a significant number of medical instruments and other artifacts; audiovisual recordings in a variety of formats; and rare and early print books, periodicals, and other publications (1542–present) in multiple languages (e.g., English, French, German, Latin, Russian) on various subjects, including anatomy and physiology, surgery, obstetrics and gynecology, pediatrics, pathology, pharmacology, psychiatry, military medicine, medical ethics, and public health.¹



Woodblock print illustration from Andreas Vesalius's De Humani Corporis Fabrica Libri Septem (On the Construction of the Human Body in Seven Books), 1934 reprint

Making Our Collections Discoverable

When I was hired in 2020 as the collection's first professionally trained archivist, I was tasked with building an archives program from the ground up. This included everything from writing our first collection development policy, to working through our backlog of unprocessed and uncataloged materials, implementing a collection management system, and promoting the collection through outreach to potential researchers and classes. While the majority of our rare books and other publications had previously been cataloged and were discoverable through the library's local catalog and WorldCat, the artifacts, manuscripts, and audiovisual recordings were for the most part completely undescribed. Describing, in some cases digitizing, and promoting those previously undiscoverable, nonbook materials became my primary focus during my first two years in the position despite the challenges presented by a COVID-19 pandemic-related shutdown that began about six weeks after I started in the position.



Civil War–era surgeon's kit featuring bone saw, screw tourniquet, tissue knife, metacarpal saw, retractor, and tenaculum

It is not uncommon for archival repositories to have plaques, awards, clothing, and other artifacts (realia) in their collections, and many of us are familiar with the unique descriptive and preservation challenges these materials can present. The History of Medicine Collection is home to hundreds of artifacts ranging in date from the late eighteenth to the early twenty-first century, including surgical and dissection kits containing objects such as saws, scalpels, tonsillotomes, forceps, hypodermic

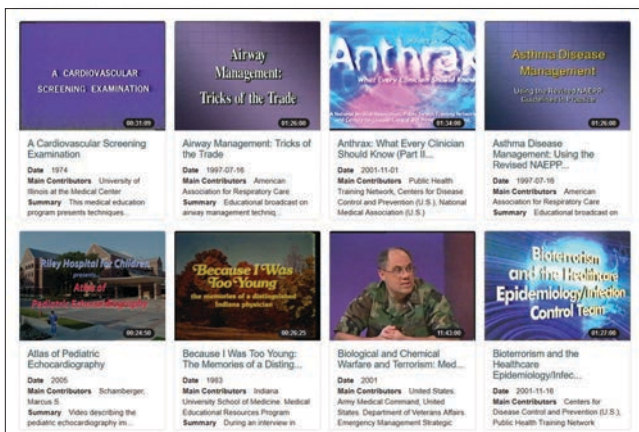
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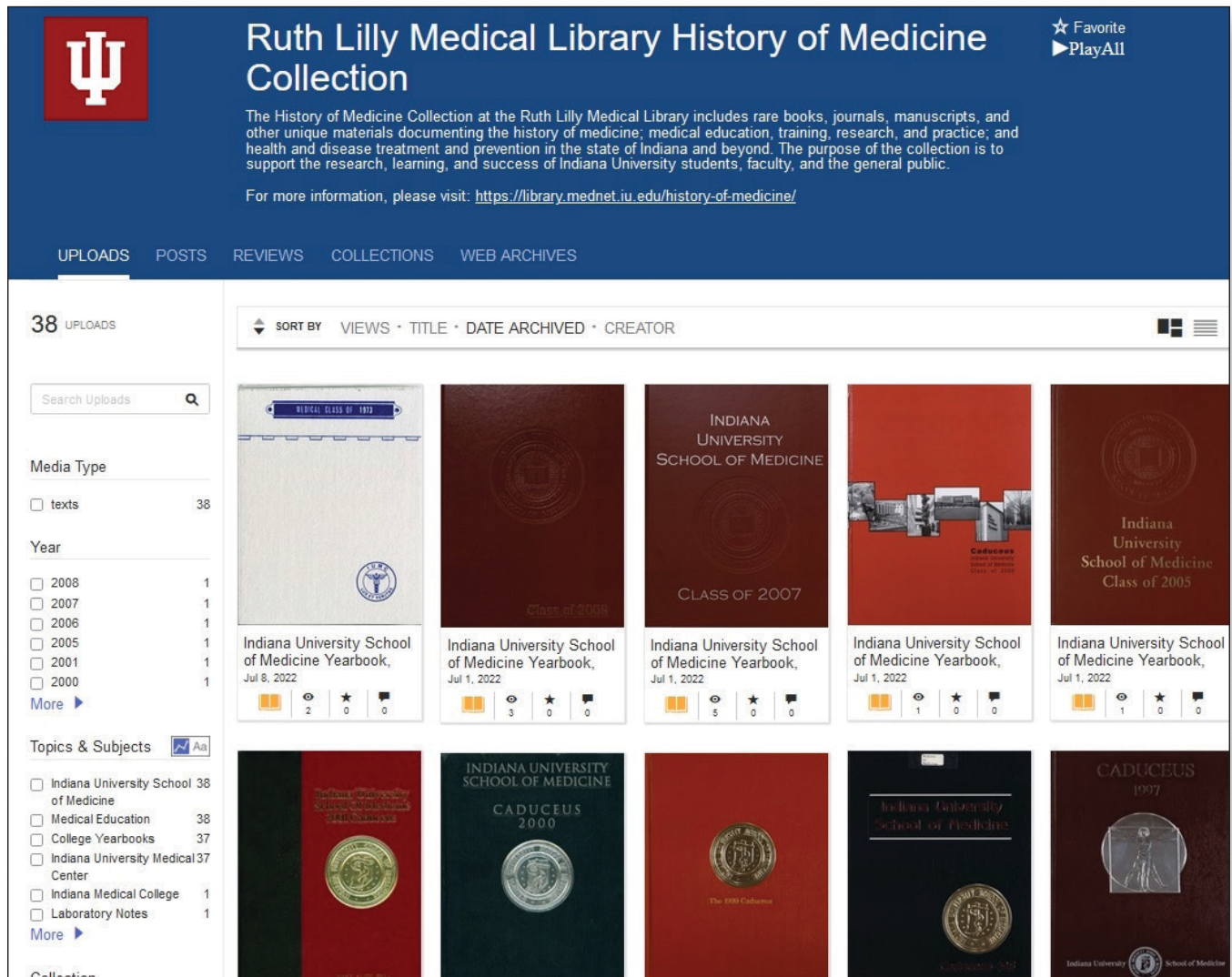
needles, probes, syringes, urethral sounds, and trepanning screws; diagnostic equipment such as microscopes, ophthalmoscopes, hemocytometers (for counting blood cells), sphygmomanometers (for measuring blood pressure), stethoscopes, and early blood sugar testing kits; as well medicine bottles, laboratory equipment, and even a life-sized model of a human skeleton. These items, most of which we have little to no provenance information for, do not lend themselves to minimal archival processing or hierarchical description. Our library was fortunate enough to be able to hire a local museum curator as a part-time, hourly contractor to accession, label, and create item-level descriptions for the artifacts in the collection, a task for which I did not have the required patience or expertise as an archivist with minimal museum experience. This artifact cataloging project is ongoing and will likely take several years to complete. Once the contractor has described an artifact on an accession sheet, I create a new accession record for it and add the detailed item-level description to an existing resource record for the artifact collection in ArchivesSpace. A DACS-compliant online finding aid for the collection is then updated to include the new item-level description in IU Archives Online, the centralized, ArcLight-based website archival repositories across the Indiana University system use to publish their finding aids.² This is the same method we use to provide access to finding aids for our more traditional manuscript collections as they are selected from the backlog for accessioning and processing.³ Additionally, to increase discoverability, we create a collection-level MARC record in the library's local catalog and WorldCat for each artifact and manuscript collection that includes a link to the online finding aid for the collection.

Increasing Access through Digital Initiatives

In addition to improving our descriptive practices for the History of Medicine Collection, we have also been able to increase discoverability of and access to the collection through various digital initiatives. In early March 2020, just days before our library closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we sent out the majority of the analog audiovisual recordings from the History of Medicine Collection to a vendor for digitization as part of Indiana University's Media Digitization & Preservation Initiative (MDPI) project to digitize thousands of audio and video recordings in over a dozen formats, mostly from archives across the university system. The university-wide project began in 2015, and we were able to get in on the tail end of it just before it officially closed in 2021.⁴ The digital surrogates created during the project, as well as additional born-digital audiovisual recordings acquired since then, were made available for direct streaming through IU Media Collections Online, an Avalon-based digital repository developed specifically to provide access to media digitized as part of the MDPI project. Since November 2020, we have uploaded over 160 items to Media Collections Online, including public health, disease awareness, and emergency preparedness programs produced by local, state, and national organizations; demonstrations of dissections and surgical procedures developed to inform medical student education; recordings of guest lectures on history of medicine and medical humanities-related topics sponsored by the library, and student and faculty presentations from the School of Medicine's annual Medical Education Day conference.⁵ This initiative has not only improved the discoverability of AV items from the History of Medicine Collection, it has also raised the overall profile of the library by increasing our level of involvement in providing access to the scholarly products generated by students and faculty researchers in the School of Medicine. The medical library was already doing this for article preprints, presentation slides, posters, and other static materials through our campus's institutional repository, but now we are also doing it for dynamic video recordings of conference presentations.



Video recordings from the History of Medicine Collection in IU Media Collections Online



IU School of Medicine yearbooks in the Internet Archive

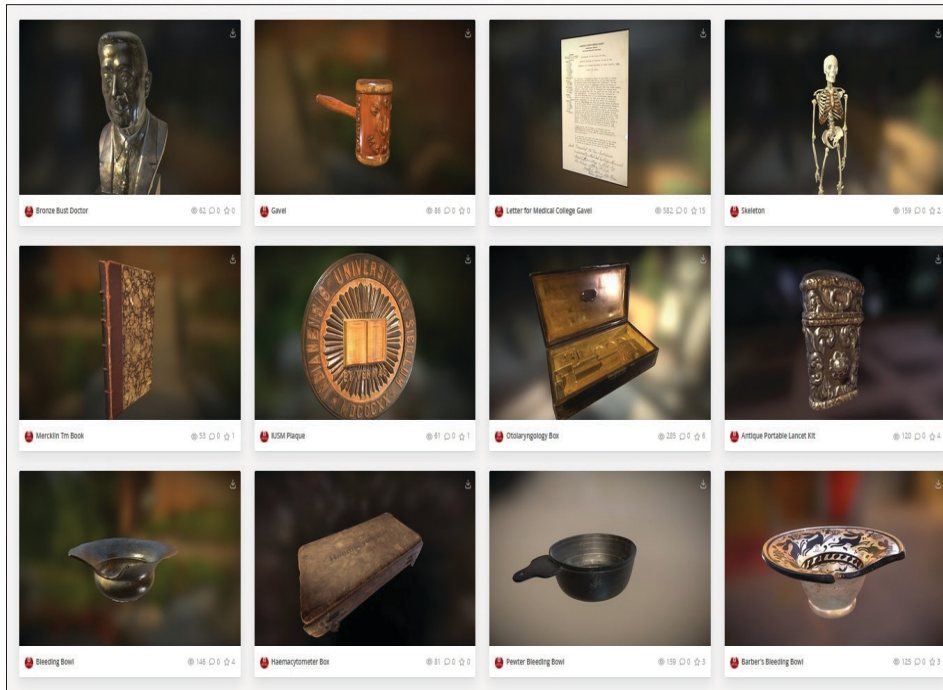
In summer 2022, in an effort to improve the discoverability of print materials in the History of Medicine Collection, we started contributing select digitized items to the Internet Archive. To date, we have made 37 issues of the IU School of Medicine yearbook and a pathology lecture and laboratory notebook that was recently digitized available in the Internet Archive.⁶ In the near future, our library intends to become a contributing partner to the

Medical Heritage Library, a collaborative digitization and discovery organization comprised of some of the world's leading medical libraries that provides open online access to history of medicine resources through a distinct collection in the Internet Archive.⁷ Joining the Medical Heritage Library will go a long way toward improving the visibility of digital resources in the History of Medicine Collection.

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3D models of History of Medicine Collection artifacts in Sketchfab

Finally, we have also been experimenting with using photogrammetry scanning equipment and software to create 3D models of artifacts from the History of Medicine Collection that researchers and learners can interact with dynamically online through a web browser or download and view using VR software on their own computers. Some test items have been uploaded to a designated collection in Sketchfab, the 3D modeling platform the Ruth Lilly Medical Library also uses to provide access to the annotated and color-coded anatomical models it creates for School of Medicine students and faculty.⁸ To date, we have uploaded models for 12 artifacts of various sizes to the collection and plan to expand this digital project in the near future to include some of our recently cataloged artifacts from the History of Medicine Collection.

NOTES

1. For a detailed summary of the resources available in the History of Medicine Collection, visit our research guide at <https://iupui.libguides.com/rmlhomresources>.
2. Though I consider myself a lone arranger, I am fortunate to be part of a large university system and therefore able to utilize the technical infrastructure and support that it provides to smaller libraries and archives like mine. Indiana University–Bloomington

Libraries, in collaboration with a working group made up of representatives from various campuses, adopted ArchivesSpace for managing archival collections and collaboratively developed and implemented ArcLight (a project initiated by Stanford University Libraries) for the online delivery and discovery of archival finding aids.

3. Ruth Lilly Medical Library finding aids, “Indiana University Archives Online,” <https://archives.iu.edu/repositories/ruthlillymedical>.
4. To learn more about “Indiana University Media Digitization & Preservation Initiative,” visit <https://mdpi.iu.edu>.
5. Ruth Lilly Medical Library collections, Indiana University Media Collections Online, “Collections,” <https://media.dlib.indiana.edu/collections?filter=Ruth+Lilly+Medical+Library>.
6. Internet Archive, “Ruth Lilly Medical Library History of Medicine Collection,” https://archive.org/details/@ruth_lilly_medical_library_history_of_medicine_collection.
7. To learn more about the Medical Heritage Library, visit www.medicalheritage.org.
8. Ruth Lilly Medical Library, “History of Medicine Collection,” IU School of Medicine, Sketchfab, <https://skfb.ly/owtsB>.