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# Oral History in Libraries

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If someone were to ask you to tell them about any oral history collections in Oklahoma, what would be your answer? Most librarians would probably suggest checking with the Oklahoma History Center as a place to start and after that, where would you look? As the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program at the Oklahoma State University Library was officially launched, we did not know of a master list of oral history collections existing in Oklahoma. We were interested in learning if there were collections, where were they, what format and condition were they in, what were the subject areas, who and how could



they be accessed, and how they were being preserved. This data will further assist with identifying collections that are at risk and gauging if there is interest in establishing a statewide oral history interest group.

To aid in our quest we applied for and received an AMIGOS fellowship to conduct a survey of Oklahoma oral history collections. Last fall the survey was distributed to over 500 institutions (defined as Oklahoma based historical societies/museums, higher education institutions/libraries, and public libraries) where oral histories might be found. We are now compiling the results from 125 surveys and would like to thank all who responded. To date, 59 oral history collections in various sizes and various

conditions have been identified. The majority of respondents indicated an interest in further educational efforts such as a symposium and in the creation of a listserv focused on oral history. Additionally, the survey helped to shed light on many barriers institutions face, like funding, lack of equipment to play older oral history recordings, storage concerns, and migration. Topics included in collections across the state range from early pioneer life to cowboys to local history recorded in many formats, from analog to digital, and all with varied forms of accessibility.

In the near future an online directory will be made available and will be posted on the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program website at [www.library.okstate.edu/oralhistory](http://www.library.okstate.edu/oralhistory). One of our hopes is to build a network of librarian and oral history professionals interested in oral history initiatives along with improving access to and promoting preservation of these unique oral narratives.

If you have an interest in oral history, save the dates of November 12 and 13, 2009 as noted oral historian Donald Ritchie who currently serves as U.S. Congress Historian will be coming to Oklahoma, thanks to Susan Feller, as part of a statewide oral history training workshop currently being organized through the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Stay tuned for more information on this exciting workshop.

—Tanya Finchum & Juliana Nykolaiszyn  
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