



## NOTES AND DOCUMENTS

# A New Approach to the Oklahoma Historical Society Oral History and Audio Archives

*By Rob Smith\**

The Oklahoma Historical Society Oral History and Audio Archives are undergoing major restructuring. The goal is to reevaluate the archives in the context of the OHS's mission: to collect, preserve, and share Oklahoma history. Under the Oral History Archives, the emphasis was mainly on collecting oral interviews. This brought in a large, diverse amount of material. With the reorganization, the goal is to place a greater emphasis on preserving and sharing these collections. This includes physical preservation as well as significant expansion of the audio digitization program.

Under the old system, the Oral History Archives consisted of two to three staff members. The new system has distributed these duties to around half a dozen staff members. This includes a part-time employee with a degree in audio engineering. Adding a staff member with this experience increases our flexibility with audio projects. This is important, as the Audio Archives is increasingly working with music and radio material, which will provide content for the new Oklahoma Museum of Music and Popular Culture proposed for Tulsa.

In order to implement a new preservation strategy for the audio collections, the staff first has to assess the condition of the collections. This involves determining the stability of the diverse types of audio formats, which range from one-hundred-year-old wax cylinders to thirty-year-old magnetic tapes to ten-year-old video tapes. Preservation actions must be taken, including elimination of mold, rehousing materials, and ensuring proper temperature and humid-

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ity for storage. Digitization is now a priority and will reduce the need to directly use original materials.

In addition to facilitating preservation, digitization also allows for more flexibility with sharing collections with patrons. Digitization also enables patrons to purchase or listen to copies of materials on site, and archivists will now have the ability to share materials through the OHS's expanding web presence. Eventually, this may include streaming and downloadable audio available to patrons online. Digitization also greatly eases the Research Division's ability to produce audio compact disks (CDs) for patrons in a timely manner.

While the staff is placing greater emphasis on preservation and sharing, they are still collecting in earnest. Oral histories are now born directly to digital formats. This includes high definition (HD) video and high-quality .WAV audio. OHS archivists are also bringing in more and more non-oral history audio collections, such as music and radio. This diversification will allow the Oral History and Audio Archives to more effectively fulfill the goals of the OHS mission.

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*Examples of the media upon which the Oral History and Audio Archives are stored. Clockwise from top left: magnetic tape, wax cylinders, and glass records.*

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