

# A Major Oral History Project to Celebrate 150 Years of Oregon State University

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## Project Background

Oregon State University, founded as Corvallis College in 1868, is Oregon's land grant university and maintains a presence in each of the state's thirty-six counties. In anticipation of the university's 150th birthday in 2018, OSU central administration commissioned a major oral history initiative. The resulting Oregon State University Sesquicentennial Oral History Project seeks to holistically document the history, impact and ambitions of the university through the recollections of various alumni, faculty, staff, administrators and current students affiliated with OSU. "OH 150" is both the largest oral history venture in university history as well as the only major web-based project to be sponsored in advance of the university's sesquicentennial. Funded by OSU's Office of the Provost as well as University Marketing and Relations, the project has been directed by the Special Collections and Archives Research Center (SCARC) at the Oregon State University Libraries.

The need for this project was made all the more urgent by the fact that virtually no oral history work of this type had been conducted at OSU for nearly twenty years. From 1975-1990, oral interviews focusing on the history of the university fell under the purview of the Horner Museum Oral History Program. The museum, a campus mainstay since its founding in the 1920s, was shuttered not long after Oregon voters passed Ballot Measure 5, a contentious property tax limitation initiative that was the focal point of the state ballot in November 1990.

Beginning in 2011, SCARC assumed responsibility for collecting and preserving new oral interviews that fit within its collecting scope. Initial projects focused on the history of science and multicultural communities of Oregon. The OH 150 initiative marked the beginning of SCARC's interviewing efforts related to university history.

## Technical Workflow

Nearly all of the interviews captured for OH 150 were conducted by three people: Chris Petersen (Project Director and Oral Historian), Mike Dicianna (Graduate Student Assistant in SCARC), and Janice Dilg (Contract Oral Historian). Transcription has been completed by two professional services working in tandem with a great many students, staff, and volunteers in SCARC. In-house transcription efforts were aided by the use of ExpressScribe transcription software.

The bulk of the project's interviews were captured using two devices: a video camera and a digital audio recorder. In most cases, the video files that resulted were treated as the primary form of capture, with the audio recordings serving a back-up function. The \*.mts video and \*.wav files that resulted from this process are the data that have been subsequently described as an archival collection. These materials have also been preserved in two geographically distinct locations, one of them a physical server and the other a location in the cloud.

Following their capture, each set of interview video files was processed in Adobe Premiere. Using this software, three sets of derivatives were created: 1) a high definition \*.m2t file that was subsequently uploaded into OSU MediaSpace, the university's Kaltura instance and an initial point of user access; 2) a lower-resolution \*.mpg video file that serves as a record of any edits made in Adobe Premiere; and 3) an \*.mp3 file stored on the SCARC department share and used for transcription purposes. Research files, photographs of interviewees, and PDF scans of interviewee release forms are also stored on the department file share. Hard copies of signed release forms - the only non-digital component of the archival collection - are held in the SCARC central files.

## A Unique Web Portal

The content gathered for this project has been made available online through a portal that was built using multiple XML formats. Those records were then transformed using XSL.

All interviews were described in records that use both the METS and MODS descriptive standards to provide structural, administrative and bibliographic metadata for each interview. More specifically, these records include information about an interview's (or interview set's) title, extent, location, and summary, while also providing machine-readable instructions defining the interview's location in OSU MediaSpace, as well as the location on the OSU Libraries web server of different images used to illustrate an interview or interview set.

All transcripts, interview abstracts, and biographical sketches were encoded using TEI, a simple XML-based mark-up language created to format literary texts for presentation online. An in-house XML standard was also written for use in "tagging" each interview by affiliation and theme.

These XML-based digital objects were then transformed by two sets of XSL stylesheets, also created in house by SCARC staff. XSLT stylesheets were used to interpret the METS records and create the HTML that forms the heart of the website. These same stylesheets were also used to call interview videos hosted within OSU MediaSpace and subsequently embedded within the OH 150 portal. XSL-FO stylesheets were likewise deployed to generate PDFs of each interview transcript. All interviews on the OH 150 portal are presented as media objects - usually video - with transcripts delivered as both HTML and PDF files.

Over the course of their creation, all XML, XSL and CSS records created for this project were stored in the OSU Libraries Git repository. Doing so provided additional security for the records, while also insuring version control and the ability to collaborate across the development team.

The OH 150 portal is a static website that is generated through a series of simple command line functions. When an edit is made to any component of the portal, the entire website is regenerated locally and uploaded *en masse* to the OSU Libraries web server. This workflow is a legacy of past projects conducted by the OSU Libraries Special Collections department; specifically, a collection of large websites devoted to the life and work of Linus Pauling. The vast majority of the code used for the OH 150 portal - particularly the XSL stylesheets, but also the templates used to create METS records - was recycled from these past projects. Though the workflow and platform would be somewhat difficult to implement at other institutions, it is very extensible and has been employed with efficiency and effectiveness at the OSU Libraries.

Users of the OH 150 portal have been provided with the option to download the full audio of each interview through a dedicated link to a download-only folder hosted in Box. OSU provides all students and staff free access to Box, a cloud-based solution that offers unlimited storage to its customers.

In addition to the ability to sort interviews by Affiliation and Theme, users are also able to search the entire web portal through a Google site search enabled specifically for the OH 150 website.

The OH 150 website, as well as other resources related to the OSU sesquicentennial celebration, will be crawled and preserved by SCARC's Archive-It instance.

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150>

## Project Data

- Project Budget (Billed Expenditures): \$60,000
- Number of Interviews Completed: 243
- Hours of Content Captured: 350
- Words Transcribed: 2.9 million

## Affiliations

The completed project contains interviews with alumni from every decade beginning in the 1930s and running up to present day. The project likewise includes sessions with faculty from each of OSU's eleven colleges, including twenty-three Distinguished Professors and three OSU Presidents. Specific interviews devoted to OSU's especially noteworthy designation as a Land, Sea, Space and Sun Grant institution are also included. Project staff traveled to Newport and Bend to capture a total of seventeen interviews focusing primarily on OSU's two branch campuses - the Hatfield Marine Science Center and OSU-Cascades. Staff also traveled to Pendleton, Hood River, Sutherlin and Klamath Falls to collect regional perspectives on Oregon's statewide university. Finally, trips to San Francisco, Denver, Houston, Washington, D.C. and Norman, Oklahoma gathered the perspectives of specific alumni and emeriti important to OSU's story.

- Alumni (110)
- Faculty (52)
- Faculty - Emeritus (54)
- Current Graduate Students (4)
- Current Undergraduate Students (6)
- Staff (10)
- Staff - Retired (12)

## Topical Strengths

A total of 111 departments, majors and points of emphasis have been identified and tagged as subjects within the collection. Certain themes that emerged as major topical strengths (n>10) of the project are as follows.

- Athletics (30)
- Entrepreneurship (16)
- Extension and Experiment Stations (24)
- Environmental Sustainability (20)
- International Studies (20)
- Journalism (17)
- Military (33)
- Multiculturalism (47)
- Oceanography (15)
- Public Service (29)
- Women - Advancement of (29)

## A Vibrant Oral History Program

At present time, SCARC is home to more than 1,700 oral history interviews described in thirty-seven archival collections. More than 500 of these interviews have been captured by SCARC faculty and students since 2010.

In 2016, the same platform used to create the OH 150 web portal was utilized to provide online access to thirty legacy interviews with retired African American Railroad Porters. This project was initiated by the Oregon Multicultural Archives, a major collecting and outreach division within SCARC. The audio interviews were conducted in the early 1980s and stored on open reel tapes. Funded by a grant from the Oregon Cultural Trust, the interviews were migrated to a digital format, transcribed, and released to the public.

The SCARC Oral History Program is presently engaged with three projects that make use of the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (OHMS). Developed by the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History at the University of Kentucky Libraries, OHMS is a web-based metadata creation and editing platform that simplifies the process of making digital interview media available online. OHMS also offers the ability to provide dynamic timestamps to transcribed interviews and the capacity to create detailed indexes of interviews as an alternative to full transcription.

Later in 2017, SCARC will release three OHMS-based websites containing more than 100 interviews culled from multiple SCARC collections. These websites will be the first three products of a larger program that we are calling "The Voices Initiative." The websites are:

**Voices of Northwest Brewing** - an outgrowth of the Oregon Hops and Brewing Archives, a component of the Special Collections and Archives Research Center, and one of only two hops and brewing-focused archives in the country.

**Multicultural Voices of Oregon** - a web portal that will present the contents of multiple SCARC oral history collections devoted to preserving the stories of traditionally under-represented groups at OSU and in Oregon. One major component of this website will be the presentation of the contents of the Oregon State Queer Archives Oral History Collection, an important initiative launched in 2015.

**Voices of Oregon Agricultural College** - a collection of digitized audiocassettes created by the Horner Museum in 1979. Each of the interviews presented on this site will relay the memories of individuals who were once affiliated with Oregon Agricultural College, as OSU was known from the late 1800s to 1927.

Two additional OHMS-based projects are slated for 2018:

**Voices of a Warming Planet** - funded by a \$3,000 OSU Libraries Internship Program grant, this project will explore the perspectives of scientists and other scholars engaged in research and public policy advocacy on the pressing issue of global climate change.

**Voices of OSU Women** - a project that will emerge out of a two-credit Honors Colloquium course being taught in Winter 2018 by two SCARC faculty and focusing on the use of oral history as a means for engaging with women's stories on campus.

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oralhistory>



# OSU150