

OU'S WESTERN
HISTORY
COLLECTIONS
CELEBRATE
75 YEARS OF
ACQUIRING,
ARCHIVING AND
PRESERVING THE
WORDS, IMAGES
AND VOICES OF A
BYGONE ERA.

Window To The West

BY JANE CANNON

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM THE
OU WESTERN HISTORY COLLECTIONS



Edward Everett Dale was a cowboy before he was a history professor, and he remained dedicated to preserving the story of the West. The distinguished library resources he established at the University had their beginning on a single shelf in his faculty office.

In the stark black and white photograph circa 1895, George and Etta Mopope come vividly, vibrantly to life. Dressed in their best buckskin clothes, the Kiowa couple stand solemn and regal before a blanket backdrop on the porch of an Oklahoma Territory home, to face the camera of pioneer photographer Annette Ross Hume.

In the faded scrawl inside a thin, black journal dated 1903, the ghost of a cowgirl speaks. Edith Tantlinger, just finished with an evening performance of a traveling Wild West Show, notes that she “shot well, considering the high wind” inside a south Texas arena that night.

On a sound recording of Native American songs, the rhythm and beauty of an ancient tribal language resonates. Spirits of long-ago singers suddenly wing into the present.

Such is the magic of a visit to the University of Oklahoma Libraries' Western History Collections. Housed in Monnet Hall on the Norman campus, the Collections open the door to the past and beg entrance to the present.

Inside the walls of the Collections' third-floor reading room, a period of history takes shape through handwritten notes, printed texts, painted images, spoken blessings, chanted songs, colorful maps. The lives of cowboys, Indian warriors, pioneer homesteaders, cattle kings and prairie thieves are more than recorded; in this room, they are resurrected.

“What makes this one of the country's outstanding repositories is the integral nature, the supportive nature of what we have here,” Curator Donald DeWitt says. “The books, the photographs, the manuscripts, all are of the same time period and all are on the same subject. The breadth of this collection is unusual and outstanding.”



The Photographic Archives boast such gems as this gathering of “Hanging L” cowboys lounging around the chuck wagon in 1885 western Oklahoma.

Ranked today among the nation’s top five university library historical collections on Oklahoma, the Great Plains, the American Southwest and Far West, the Western History Collections is 75 years old this year. At birth, it was only a shelf full of books in a history professor’s office, but like Western expansion, time and acquisitions increased its significance.

The man credited with founding the Collections was no ordinary history professor. Raised on a north Texas ranch, Edward Everett Dale grew up cutting brush, mending fences, baling hay and punching cattle. As a young man, he rode as a cowboy for neighboring ranchmen and occasionally worked as a trail driver, moving herds to new ranges in Oklahoma Territory. He was a participant in the drama of frontier development, and he carried this experience with him into the academic world. With joy, Dale discovered under the tutelage of Harvard’s Frederick Jackson Turner that the West was substantive American history.



“I think he felt his background was distinctly Western, as opposed to Southwest or the Midwest,” DeWitt notes. “Having grown up rural, living on a ranch and doing all the work that goes along with that, he had a perspective that was unusual among American history professors. This set him a little apart.”

By 1927, Dale was head of OU’s history department. Wanting to do something for his graduate students, he negotiated with petroleum executive Frank Phillips to finance a small, permanent

collection of material pertinent to the study of the American West. Phillips, an Oklahoma history buff, had hoped to establish just such a collection near his home in Bartlesville. Thanks to intermediary Patrick Hurley, a successful Oklahoma City attorney and mutual friend of both Dale and Phillips, the oilman eventually agreed to support the development at OU. Phillips pledged \$10,000—\$2,000 a year for five years—to the project with an agreement that after the initial five-year period, the University would continue developing the collection. In return, OU agreed to name the collection for Frank Phillips.

A 1927 invoice shows that Dale’s first book purchase was William Philo Clark’s *Indian Sign Language* (1865). He made many more purchases in the intervening years until his retirement in 1952, expanding the collection’s acquisitions to include such diverse holdings as the Cherokee Nation Papers, volumes on American Indians collected in the 1920s



Celebration of the OU Western History Collections' 75th anniversary began with Curator Don DeWitt, right, accepting the gift of a portrait of Osage Chief Bacon Rind from President David Boren and First Lady Molly Shi Boren. The chief, who was born in 1860, was a great favorite of photographers and portrait painters.

to aid the federal Merriam Commission, personal correspondence of the pioneering Ridge-Watie-Boudinot family and an account of an 1870s survey expedition into Nevada and Arizona. He believed in documenting the whole of the American Southwest, including the Spanish and Mexican periods, American Indian history—and his favorite, the westward expansion of the American frontier.

The Phillips Collection formed the core of what was to become the Western History Collections. In 1967, at the urging of history professor and curator Arrell M. Gibson, the collection was consolidated with the main library's Manuscripts Division, which under aggressive archivist Gaston Litton had acquired its own impressive collection of Western history resource material. To strengthen rather than rival each other, the two collections were joined.

"The two people who really personify the Collections are Dale and Gibson. They shared some of the same qualities. Both were very personable men who could articulate the sense of history Oklahomans believed they had. Both men made people more a part of history," DeWitt says.

To Dale and Gibson, history was people. Individual lives mattered, not just as historical record. To immortalize a life was



Sharpshooter Phoebe Anne Oakley Mozee, who starred in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show as "Annie Oakley," is shown in this circa 1885 photo from the Western History Collections.

to capture the soul of a time and place. Both curators did their part with the time and places they held.

When Dale acquired from Hume 750 glass plate negatives documenting life of Southern Plains Indians on land near Anadarko between 1891 and 1910, he rescued from obscurity flesh and blood people. They had names: Tso-Tuddle, Red Bone, Etta and George Mopope, a shy, young maiden known only as Lili, but whose sepia image preserves her youth and beauty forever.

Gibson worked to guarantee that Native American traditions and customs were preserved. He negotiated for Edward Sheriff Curtis' photographic documentaries of Native Americans' lifestyle between 1907 and 1930. With the backing of President Theodore Roosevelt, Curtis visited more than 80 tribes, taking 40,000 pictures, 2,000 of which appear in a 20-volume series Gibson obtained for the Collections.

Through the years, holdings have grown to include all types of documentation of the country's past from more than 5,000 maps related to Indian Territory and the early days of Western settlement stretching from Kentucky to California to a collection of road maps supplied to motorists by petroleum companies; from dime store novels of the early 1900s that popularized Western heroes like William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody to the colorful banners and posters that promoted the 101 Ranch and Wild West shows; from Civil War-era diaries to a missionary's letters home and a cowgirl's journal; from glass plate negatives of reservation life to yearbook photos of OU's first students and sports memorabilia from the Bud Wilkinson era.

The Collections today consist of three separate divisions: the Library Division, the Manuscripts and University Archives Division, and perhaps the most used division,

the Photographic Archives. Quality reproductions from the Photographic Archives are used frequently in television productions and movies (Who has not recognized photos of the real Hole In The Wall Gang in the opening credits of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid?*), to decorate the walls of theme restaurants or covers of record albums and compact discs, as well as to illustrate scholarly research. All copies are made on site, and fees for the service go to support important preservation work.

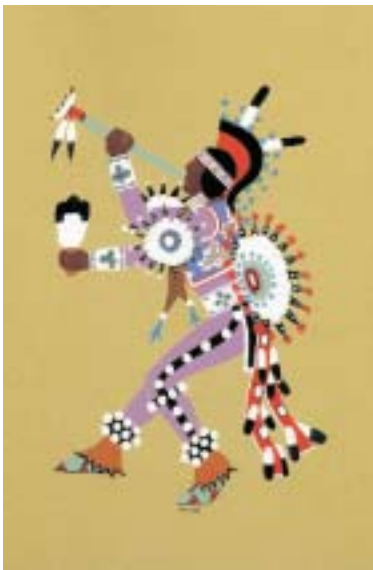
The Associates of the Western History Collections, a formal support group organized in the early 1970s under curator John



A hand-colored map of North America from the *Atlas Compendiarius Quinquaginta Tabularum Geographicarum Homannianarum*, published in Nuremberg, Germany, circa 1759, is contained in the Henry B. Bass Collection.



In great demand from the Western History Collections' photo archives are prints of this 1901 shot of the Hole in the Wall Gang, or the "Wild Bunch," led by Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid.



The Western History Collections contains significant art, such as the *Humming Bird Dance*, by Kiowa Five artist Jack Hokeah, 1928.

General Patrick J. Hurley, shown fourth from left with the crew of B-29 "Dottie" in Chungking in November 1944, played a major role on the world stage, notably as Secretary of War and Ambassador to China. A native Oklahoman, Hurley gave his extensive collection of papers, photos and personal belongings to the Western History Collections.





The West wasn't all cowboys and Indians; the post-WWII West was also college kids at a pep rally before the 1953 OU/Notre Dame football game, photographed in the University of Oklahoma Collection.

Ezell, sponsors traveling exhibits and hosts public events that enhance the library's visibility. DeWitt, who has served as curator since 1986, says he relies on the Associates for help in continuing a strong tradition of acquisition. "We keep an eye out always," he says.

On staff with DeWitt is assistant curator, librarian and photographic archivist John R. Lovett and manuscripts librarian Kristina L. Southwell, who recently compiled two new guides to the Collections' holdings being published by the University of Oklahoma Press to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the repository's founding.

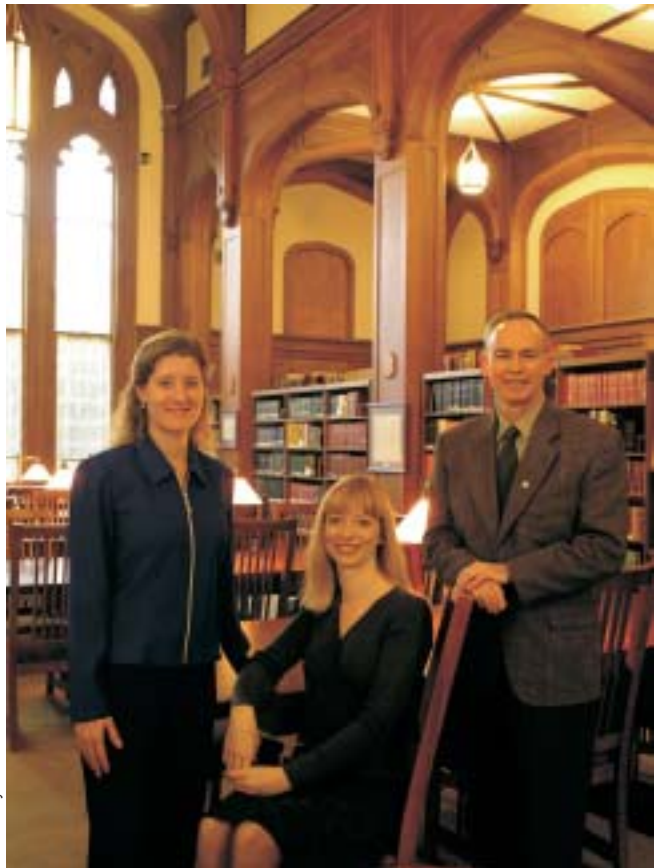
Lovett has been associated with the Collections longer than either DeWitt or Southwell, starting as a student employee in 1983 under Ezell. The part-time job "changed the course of my career," he says, adding, "I was smitten." Planning to get a master's degree in history, Lovett soon switched to library science.

He calls it "a rare privilege" to come to work every day in the recently restored 1912 grandeur of the Collections' reading room, which was first used as the library of the School of Law. "To be surrounded by such wonderful treasures, to see the improvements through the years and to be a part of it all is truly an honor. I've been here 19 years, and I've never really thought of leaving. I hope to retire from here."

With the kind of investment that comes from time and springs from the heart, Lovett admits it is hard not to feel proprietary. "But I have to remember I'm only a caretaker. Others will come after me. My job is to take care of it so that it can be passed on."



This embroidered souvenir banner from the centennial celebration at the 1876 Philadelphia International Exhibition is part of WHC's W.D. Grisso Collection.



Robert Taylor

WHC staff assistant Stacie L. Graves, left, manuscripts librarian Kristina L. Southwell and assistant curator John R. Lovett take advantage of one of the campus' most impressive settings, the Western History Collections Reading Room on Monnet Hall's third floor.