

Sound preservation

by ANGELA CHAMBERS

Joining what has become a national movement, the Oklahoma Historical Society is digitally archiving various media in its collection — primarily the unusual and at risk — to prevent the content from being lost forever.

Discerning Oklahomans are helping the cause by donating or loaning collections directly to the archive.

For example, the Woody Guthrie Center here in Tulsa recently sent a collection of audio cassettes and other materials called the Wolfenstein Research Collection to Oklahoma City so OHS Archivist **JA Pryse** could digitally transfer the materials.

Gathered by **Eugene Victor Wolfenstein**, a professor of political science at the University of California from 1965-2010, and his wife, **Judith**, the collection includes audio recordings of **Woody Guthrie's** family and friends, transcripts from the couple's research on Guthrie, articles and correspondence with the musician.

Wolfenstein donated the collection to Woody Guthrie Publications in 2003, and the items were gifted to the Woody Guthrie Center Archives in 2011.

According to the WGC, the research might have been groundwork for an abandoned biography. **Kate Blalack**, WGC archivist, notes the collection is a "rich source of information for our scholars to build their own inquiries upon."

If the materials were not digitally transferred now, Pryse says, this in-



JA Pryse, Oklahoma Historical Society archivist, is digitally transferring various music collections to preserve them, including audio of Woody Guthrie's family and friends. Pryse is pictured with Kate Blalack, archivist at the Woody Guthrie Center, which sent the collection to the OHS.

valuable Guthrie history could face the same fate as unpreserved works that will eventually deteriorate or become inaccessible due to their outdated format. And when the information becomes accessible to the public online, researchers and enthusiasts worldwide can listen to materials once solely housed in Tulsa.

During Pryse's 2014 residency at the Smithsonian, archivists praised the OHS for its ability to digitize specialty formats in-house using some methods the Washington, D.C., museum couldn't perform.

The capabilities of the OHS are thanks largely to Oklahomans who have donated equipment to make possible specialized digitalization — a testament to the state's musical heritage and pride.

When the OHS publicized its need for a wax cylinder phonograph, for example, Pryse says the item was donated.

Another important collection that's now digitally preserved is **Bob Wills'** World War II-era glass discs, which contain rare radio recordings. The lacquer on the discs was flaking when the OHS received the collection, increasing the urgency of their transfer into the modern format.

The Grammy Foundation provided the historical society with a grant to do this work because one of the foundation's priorities is to preserve music from decay. The OHS hopes to make some of the digital pieces available to the public this spring.

The historical society also has hundreds of **Leon Russell** recordings, photographs and more, thanks to Tulsa native **Steve Todoroff's** tireless nationwide search.

Jeff Moore, project director for the planned Oklahoma Museum of Popular Culture (OKPOP) in Tulsa, says the digital archives ultimately will be part of the proposed museum. He hopes the Oklahoma Legislature will fund its construction this year.

If you find yourself with old albums, store them in a cool, dark place. And don't let your local pharmacy transfer the audio to another format. The staff aren't specialists and may ruin the original. Pryse says he's happy to answer questions about proper archiving via email at jjapryse@okhistory.org.

Since even our current digital formats will become unrecognizable in years to come, the OHS archivists are always thinking ahead about the next way to preserve our history. Until then, search for "OHSfilm" and "OHSaudioDept" on YouTube and enjoy the society's digitized collection of archived film, video and audio recordings. *tp*



Angela Chambers has experienced Oklahoma culture for most of her adult life but adds to the Sooner perspective from her time living, studying and traveling around the world.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

FAT TUESDAY FESTIVITIES Dance with street performers and a jazz band at the Mardi Gras Masquerade on Feb. 13 at the Sky Loft, 15 E. Fifth St. Your indulgences will go toward a good cause: New Hope Oklahoma's work to end intergenerational incarceration. Ten restaurants will provide food and drinks, and a live art auction will showcase painters creating works while guests bid on the developing pieces. Tickets are \$100 and include an open bar, dinner and a performance by comedian **Ken Rogerson**. Visit www.newhopeoklahoma.org/mardigras2015.

"DOING THE IMPOSSIBLE" Author **James Bradley**, whose father, **John Bradley**, was one of the men photographed raising a flag on Iwo Jima in 1945, used this story to write his bestselling book, "Flags of Our Fathers." **Clint Eastwood** later made the true tale into a film. Bradley will speak about ordinary people accomplishing extraordinary things during a Feb. 27 Tulsa Town Hall lecture at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center's Chapman Music Hall, 110 E. Second St. Visit www.tulsatownhall.com.

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