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Making the Archives Visible: The Oregon Historical Society Research Library's Blog

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Jennifer Keyser works as a reference librarian in the Davies Family Research Library at the Oregon Historical Society. She received her MLS, with honors, from Emporia State University, and her BA in history from Reed College. She has worked in a variety of libraries, including academic (University of Oregon — Portland Library), corporate (Ziba, CH2M Hill), archives (Oregon Historical Society and Lewis and Clark College), and public libraries (Multnomah County Library, which included driving the book mobile). She is active with the Oregon Chapter of the Special Library Association (ORSLA). Currently, she is serving as ORSLA's President-Elect. Outside of archives and libraries, Jennifer enjoys exploring Oregon, filmmaking, and solving puzzles.

The Davies Family Research Library at the Oregon Historical Society recently launched a blog through the popular microblogging site Tumblr. The Research Library is nestled away on the fourth floor of the OHS building with most of the collections tucked away in boxes, folders, drawers and off-site storage, not readily visible to visitors. Although blogs are nothing new to libraries, we viewed the social media platform as an easy solution to creating awareness of the various and unique collections at OHS, as well as the services offered by the library. The blog allowed for the creation of an online space to highlight the library's diverse materials, including photographs, films, manuscripts and ephemera. Ultimately, it provides people with a peek at the varied history of the Pacific Northwest and a sense of the unique documents held at OHS.

The Research Library's blog was developed as an outreach service that would allow library staff to easily connect with a broader community outside of the brick and mortar library. The library staff at OHS is relatively small, especially in comparison to the extensive collections and numerous research requests, both in person and at a distance. The staff has limited time to provide services outside of the library. The blog appeared to be a simple solution for making the collections more visible without taking the library staff away from the library visitors and collections.

Since the Research Library is part of a larger institute, we needed to make the case for why the library needed its own blog. We created a brief report, which included examples of blogs managed by archives and libraries, options for host sites, and information on how the organizations handled images, especially in terms of copyright, watermarks, and ability to download. After the blog was approved as a library outreach service, we set up a Tumblr account, customized the page, and officially launched the OHS Research Library page.

We chose the Tumblr platform for its user-friendly interface, customizability, and visual appeal. In addition, Tumblr posts can be linked to Facebook accounts and the images are often



promoted within the Tumblr site. Library staff quickly set up the Tumblr account and without the assistance of IT. We promoted the blog via Facebook, as well as through local and national library, archives and history networks. We included a link to the page on the library's website. It has proven to be a popular blog with a growing crowd of "followers" and a wide variety of bloggers sharing the posts on their Tumblr accounts.

We have yet to evaluate the blog page as an outreach service program. However, we have set up Google Analytics for tracking activity relating to the blog. In addition, we have noted the monthly data provided by Tumblr. Most of the feedback has been written or oral, and all positive. Regular library users have indicated how they enjoy the daily posts. A group of cartographers visited the Research Library, because of an unusual map that was posted on the blog. None of them had been to the library before and they were pleased to discover the resources in the Research Library that are available to the public. Overall, the Tumblr page has been a worthwhile endeavor that is easy to manage, provides a place to showcase the collections, and creates awareness of the library.

The Tumblr account is managed by Matthew Cowan, Moving Images and Photography Archivist, and Jennifer Keyser, Reference Librarian. Cowan and Keyser hand select items to post to the site, as well as solicit ideas from library staff and volunteers. The Tumblr page is updated daily, often with multiple posts. The blog can be viewed at <http://ohsresearchlibrary.tumblr.com/>.



Welcome to the wonderland of the OHS Research Library. The library is open to the public, please visit us or order photos online.



Salem Commercial Club flier, 1914

