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Las Historias de Latinos en Oregón: Canby, Oregón An Oral History Project Collaboration Between A Librarian and an Archivist

Erratum

Correct capitalization in article title 8/4/17

Las Historias de Latinos en Oregón: Canby, Oregón

An Oral History Project Collaboration Between a Librarian and an Archivist

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Natalia is the Curator and Archivist of the Oregon Multicultural Archives (OMA) and the OSU Queer Archives (OSQA) at the Oregon State University Special Collections and Archives Research Center. Fernández's mission for directing the OMA and the OSQA is to work in collaboration with Oregon's African American, Asian American, Latino/a, Native American, and OSU's LGBTQ+ communities to support them in preserving their histories and sharing their stories. Her scholarship relates to her work as an archivist, specifically best practices for working with communities of color. Fernández has been published in the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, *Journal of Western Archives*, *The*

American Archivist, and *Multicultural Perspectives*. Fernández holds an M.A. in Information Resources and Library Science from the University of Arizona (U of A). She graduated from the U of A Knowledge River Program, a program that focuses on community-based librarianship and partnerships with traditionally under-served communities.

Introduction

In the spring of 2015, I began the oral history project *Latinos en Oregón* to document the stories of Oregon's Latino/a communities. As the curator and archivist of the Oregon Multicultural Archives (OMA) at the Oregon State University (OSU) Special Collections and Archives Research Center, my job is to assist in preserving the histories and sharing the stories that document Oregon's African American, Asian American, Latino/a, and Native American communities (Oregon Multicultural Archives, 2005). There are gaps in the historical record as it pertains to people of color in Oregon, and the OMA seeks to address those gaps and empower communities to share their stories. Because oral histories are the recorded life stories of the people who lived them, they are a unique addition to the historical record. Oral histories enable interviewees to share their perspectives, thoughts, and opinions about their lives and the communities in which they live. *Latinos en Oregón* began in Jefferson County as a collaboration between the OMA and OSU's Juntos Program, an after-school program that aims to prepare Latino/a high school students and their families for college. The project expanded to Yamhill County in 2016 as part of a yearlong county grant project. The grant included partnerships between the local historical society and the community-based, non-profit organization, Unidos Bridging Community. It was in the spring of 2016 that I embarked on a small, short-term oral history project in collaboration with the Canby Public Library, a collaboration that began through REFORMA Oregon. In this article, I will share the background history about the



Latinos en Oregón project, detail the collaboration between the OMA and the Canby Public Library, and provide information about the Canby oral history interviews and the stories the interviewees shared.

Project Background

I joined REFORMA Oregon in early 2015, shortly after its establishment in late 2014 as an official REFORMA National Chapter. Soon after, I began attending the in-person quarterly meetings. The meetings were always very inspirational as each of the attendees, mostly public librarians, shared updates on their various projects and community programs at the end of each meeting. Impressed by the connections and strong relationships the REFORMA Oregon members had with the Latino/a communities in their areas, I thought it would be a great opportunity to give an in-depth presentation about the *Latinos en Oregón* project. At the October 2015 meeting in Redmond, I shared information about the OMA, the project, oral history best practices and examples, and various scenarios for potential collaborations between the OMA and public libraries. As I noted in my presentation, beginning a community documentation project can be challenging. You must introduce yourself to members of the community and build a trusting relationship with them before you can gather project participants. From the perspective of an archivist, projects are most successful when we collaborate with community liaisons who are able to connect us with local communities. I encouraged the public librarians to consider the idea of oral history projects with their communities, as well as consider acting as community liaisons for the *Latinos en Oregón* project. Through REFORMA Oregon, I met with Angelica Novoa De Cordeiro of the Canby Public Library and together we worked on the *Latinos en Oregón*: Canby, Oregón oral history project.

Oregon Multicultural Archives and Canby Public Library Collaboration

The Oregon Multicultural Archives' partnership with the Canby Public Library (CPL) began in the fall of 2015. The CPL had recently received a Latino Americans: 500 Years of History grant (American Library Association, n.d.) to host a series of programs including movie screenings and discussions, a community-wide read followed by discussions, various kids' programs, and oral history interviews. Novoa De Cordeiro initially contacted me to request to use images from the OMA collections, and we soon began a conversation about the CPL's plans for the oral histories she thought would likely be conducted in the spring of the next year. In April of 2016, I traveled to Canby to meet with Novoa De Cordeiro and her colleague Hanna Hofer, Programming/Public Relations, to discuss the details of the collaborative project. They informed me that as part of the grant, CPL had committed to documenting the personal stories of at least six members of the Latino/a community in Canby. I shared examples of my oral history work with other Latino/a communities, and we brainstormed what workflow strategies would work best for an OMA and CPL collaboration.

Due to Novoa De Cordeiro's work providing services to the Canby area's Spanish-Speaking communities (Novoa De Cordeiro, 2016), she already had a number of potential interviewees in mind. Her criteria for selecting interviewees was to contact members of the community she thought had great stories to tell, had positively impacted the Latino/a community, and would likely be willing to participate in the project. I offered to train Novoa De Cordeiro in conducting oral history interviews and loan her audio recording equipment;



however, due to her limited time availability, we decided that I would be the interviewer. Novoa De Cordeiro's tasks as part of the project were to contact potential interviewees; explain the project; schedule the day, time, and location for the interviews based on a set of dates I gave her; and act as a liaison between myself and the interviewees as needed. One of the main challenges with any oral history project is scheduling the interviews. I tried to be as flexible as possible, and we both made sure to maintain regular communication in case of needed rescheduling. Novoa De Cordeiro also had the essential task of conducting very short, non-recorded pre-interviews. During the pre-interviews, she would share the interview questions, explain the consent form for interviewees to sign, and answer any questions or assuage any concerns. On the dates of the interviews, Novoa De Cordeiro would meet with both the interviewee and myself for an introduction and would chat with us for a bit to ensure that we were both comfortable until it was time for the interview; she would return at the conclusion of the interview.

In my role as the interviewer and archivist, I also had a set of tasks. First, I shared the list of interview questions, in both Spanish and English, which I had used in previous projects. Novoa De Cordeiro and I reviewed the questions together, and she shared them with interviewees during the pre-interviews and explained they could focus on certain questions or only answer the ones with which they felt most comfortable. She also let me know of any particular topics I should cover with certain interviewees based on information she had gathered as part of the pre-interview process. On the dates of the interviews, I traveled to Canby, provided the recording equipment, and conducted the interviews. Afterwards, I archived the digital files as part of the OMA collections and made them accessible online. However, prior to making the interviews accessible to the public, I would send them to Novoa De Cordeiro. Continuing her work as my liaison to the interviewees, she followed up with approvals or edits to the interviews. An OMA student worker wrote short biographies and interview summaries of the oral histories, in both Spanish and English, and I wrote a blog post on the OMA blog with all the interview information and links to the recordings (Oregon Multicultural Archives Blog, 2016).

Latinos en Oregón: Canby, Oregón Interviews

The *Latinos en Oregón: Canby, Oregón* oral history project includes the stories of seven Latino/as or Anglos who are involved with the Latino/a community. The Latino/a community in Canby has comprised about 20 percent of the population since 2010, up from about 15 percent in 2000 (Census Viewer, 2016). Novoa De Cordeiro selected interviewees who could not only share their personal experiences, but also speak to the changing dynamics in Canby regarding the town's demographics and the connections being made between the Latino/a and Anglo communities. The interviews took place between late April and May 2016 and vary in length between 45 to 105 minutes. Two of the interviewees agreed to be video recorded; the other five selected an audio-only recording. All but one of the interviews are in Spanish with one interviewee offering to conduct two interviews, one for each language. The questions asked were divided into various sections including family and ancestors, immigration to the United States (if applicable), life in Canby, a list of various topics and traditions, and closing thoughts. Each interviewee had the opportunity to focus on certain aspects of their lives and/or topics as best fit the stories they wanted to share.




The Canby, Oregon, oral history project interviewees included Melissa Reid, Miriam Pastrana, Sabino Arredondo, Charlie Gingerich, Margarita Cruz, Gudelia Villán Ramos, and Jorge Paz; the following brief descriptions are just a sample of the stories the interviewees shared:

- Melissa Reid, a teacher for many years in Canby schools, spoke about her experiences working with local Latino/a families, as well as stories from her time in Honduras, and her love of learning multiple languages.
- Miriam Pastrana, born in the United States, but raised in Mexico, shared her life story of moving to Oregon, her perspectives on the differences between living in Mexico and the United States, and her thoughts on the Latino/a community in Canby and how it has changed through the years.
- Sabino Arredondo, an accountant, talked about his childhood in Mexico, moving to the United States at the age of ten as a member of one of the first Mexican families in Canby, as well as his professional and personal experiences living in Canby for over 30 years.
- Charlie Gingerich, a businessman who has lived near or in Canby his entire life, discussed the community organization Bridging Cultures Canby, which was officially established circa 2010, but has its roots in a volunteer lunch program that began in 2000.
- Margarita Cruz shared stories of being raised in Mexico, life in Canby since her move with her family to the town in 2008, and her experiences as an agricultural worker.
- Gudelia Villán Ramos spoke about the hardships she endured growing up in Mexico, her decision to immigrate to the United States, and her life in Canby with many relatives that live in the area.
- Jorge Paz, an agricultural worker for many years who is currently retired, discussed his experiences working in his native country of Guatemala, as well as his time in Mexico, California, and finally Oregon.

Concluding Thoughts

As is represented in the Canby oral histories, Oregon's Latino/a communities have a deep and diverse history. New generations continue to contribute greatly to the identity of the state. With the Latino/a population in Oregon predicted to increase in the coming years, it is not only necessary to ensure those voices are recorded, but listened to by all communities to foster understanding and acceptance. *Latinos in Oregon* is a project dedicated to collecting and preserving the voices and stories of Latino/a communities in Oregon. My current plans for the project include continuing my relationship with the OSU Juntos Program and Yamhill County's Unidos organization, as well as expanding it to the Hood River area. I am in conversations to collaborate with the Hood River Museum Latino/a Exhibit Advisory Board,



which includes a local public librarian and fellow REFORMA Oregon member. Public libraries can play an important role in documenting their communities' history, and can make great connections via an organization like REFORMA Oregon. I encourage librarians who work with their local Latino/a communities to join in on the opportunity for a collaborative story gathering project with the OMA through the *Latinos en Oregon* project. 

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