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Out-of-Print Books as e-Books: A Collection Analysis

By Mary Frances Calix

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Readers: Dr. Teresa Welsh

Dr. Sarah Mangrum

INTRODUCTION

Preservation of historical materials is just one of many purposes of an archive. State archives will often collect personal materials of important people associated with the history of the state, items associated with historic events, and documents and/or books that have some historical significance. Materials contained in archives will often be unique and therefore must be preserved for future generations. According to the Society of American Archivists (2020), "Archives have specific guidelines for how people may use collections to protect the materials from physical damage and theft, keeping them and their content accessible for posterity" (para. 2).

In recent years, archival institutions have begun to digitally archive or preserve the items in their collections. This way, items are more accessible to those wanting to perform research but not necessarily handle the original documents and are not likely to be permanently damaged. One example of a digital preservation project is the one that forms the basis for this paper- the Oklahoma Historical Society's collection of out-of-print historical books that have been made available as e-books. Created over three years ago, this collection contains 22 books about Oklahoma and Texas history. The original publication dates of the books cover the years 1975 to 1986, and the conversion to e-books covers a period of nine years- 2010 to 2019.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the collection of out-of-print books on Oklahoma and Texas history that have recently been made available as e-books by the Oklahoma History Center.

Research Questions

R1. When was the last printing of the out-of-print books on Oklahoma and Texas history converted into

e-book format by the Oklahoma History Center?
What period of time do they cover?

R2. How many of the e-books could be categorized within each of the following types of non-fiction: biography, technical guides or handbooks, or expository?

R3. How many of the e-books could be categorized within the following subject areas: geographical history, history of natural resources, history of people?

Definitions

Content analysis: Close analysis of a work or body of communicated information to determine its meaning and account for the effect it has on its audience (ODLIS, 2020)

E-book (electronic book): A digital version of a traditional print book designed to be read on a personal computer or e-book reader (ODLIS, 2020)

Out of print (OP): A publication no longer obtainable through regular market channels because the publisher's inventory is exhausted, with no prospect of another printing in the foreseeable future (ODLIS, 2020)

Delimitations of the Study

This study is limited to the collection of the Oklahoma Historical Society's archives, focusing on the collection of out-of-print historical books that have been published as e-books.

Assumptions

It is assumed that all materials accessed in the e-book collection are accurate copies of the original works (e.g., not missing any content or publication information), that all information in the descriptions of materials on the museum website is accurate, and that the museum has obtained any necessary

permission to reproduce the materials in e-book form. It is also assumed that the publication dates listed for each book are the last print dates recorded, and there are no recent printings. Finally, it is assumed that the collection used for this project remains accessible electronically throughout the duration of the research.

Importance of the study

This study is important to the library and information science field (particularly the area of archival studies) because it explores the preservation and digitization of out-of-print and other materials that may otherwise be inaccessible to archive patrons. This study can be a valuable resource to historians interested in the history of the southern Great Plains, especially geographic and economic history.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Usage of e-Books

Tracy (2019) discussed the challenge associated with analyzing e-book usage, such as the comparability of e-book usage and print book usage. In one study conducted by Zhang et al. (2017), the researchers found that in the vast majority of e-book uses, the patron accessed only 30 pages or fewer. Because it is impossible to know how much of a print book patrons read, it is difficult to compare actual usage between the two mediums. Tracy (2019) also determined that the adoption of LIS textbooks as e-books shows that e-books have a greater use more recently than in their early years.

Use of Digital Archives for Historical Research

Historians, who often are focused on using primary sources, may prefer to use documents in their original form or, in keeping with the times, consult digital formats. Librarians need to understand the reasons historians consult digital archives (Sinn 2013). One reason is the ease of access. According to Sinn and Soares (2014), digitizing archival collections has allowed easier access to historical materials, including using Google. Most of their participants found that digital archives contained relevant content.

Of course, there are downsides to using e-books; Vogus (2020) examined the advantages and disadvantages of e-books. Prior to 2020, many libraries began to purchase more e-books to provide more access to their resources. E-books have several restrictions, including digital rights management, use restrictions, and barriers to interlibrary loan programs.

Acquisition of e-Books

Lewis and Kennedy (2019) asserted that e-books are considered advantageous for patrons needing instant and timely access to content, but acquisition challenges exist, especially impacts on library workflow. Electronic resource management (ERM) systems (e.g., LibGuides, LibAnswers) can assist in managing a library's electronic resources. Beisler and Kurt (2012) noted three possible acquisition paths for e-books: database subscription or standing order, one-time purchase with no annual fees, or one-time purchase with annual fees. One tactic for managing workflow is to use outside vendors for time-consuming tasks. This can be especially helpful when a library has a small staff but high demand for electronic resources (Amsberry, 2005; Bickers, 2002).

Methodological Considerations in the Literature

One study, in particular, served as the primary guide for the methodology used for the present study. Fallis' (2015) study on the army manuals held by the National World War II Museum Archives analyzed and surveyed that collection. Fallis (2015) performed a content analysis in which she answered the following research questions:

- How many War Department manuals are held in the National World War II Museum archives collection, and how many of these are monographs?
- How many and what percentage of the manuals are Educational Manuals (EM), how many and what percentage are Technical Manuals (TM), and how many and what percentage are Field Manuals (FM)?
- What subjects do each type of manual address?

Fallis (2015) served as a model for the research questions and methods developed for the proposed study because the study is a good example of content analysis. Similar to Fallis, this study explores the size and scope of the collection, including an analysis of the publication history of the books, the historical periods covered, the types of non-fiction, the subjects covered, and the target audiences of the books in the collection.

METHODOLOGY

This study examined a collection of out-of-print books converted into e-books by the Oklahoma History Center archives. The following characteristics were analyzed to answer the research questions related to the number of out-of-print books on Oklahoma and Texas history converted into e-books: the last print date of each book, the timeline covered in each book, and the subject area of each book.

Information Sources and Procedures

The data for this study were collected from the Oklahoma History Center's archive webpages and archival collections. These pages were available through the Oklahoma Historical Society's Research Center and the Gateway to Oklahoma History. Data for the research questions were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, and figures were created to visualize the results. Categories recorded in the spreadsheet included book title, last print date, time period(s) covered, non-fiction category, and subject area.

Data were analyzed using a qualitative method (content analysis) to determine patterns of meaning that described the collection and answered the research questions listed in the introduction section of this study. The various aspects of the content were coded and categorized to determine these patterns of meaning. Tables containing descriptive

counts and percentages were provided within the text of the study to visualize the data.

Limitations

This study used the website for the Oklahoma Historical Society's archives, in particular, focusing on the collection of out-of-print historical books that have been published as e-books. Because this is one archive that also is small, the findings of this study are not generalizable to archives outside of the one explored in the current study.

RESULTS

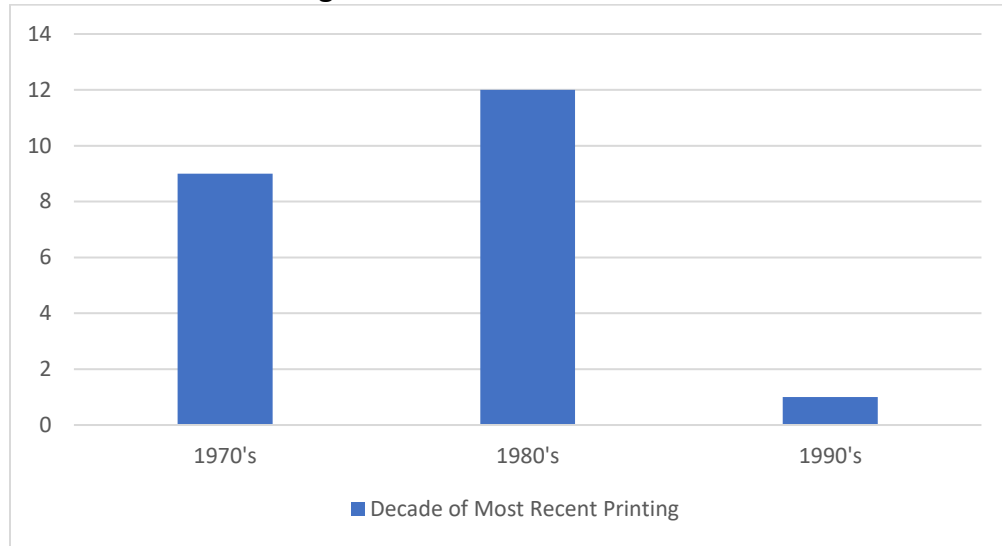
A total of twenty-two books were examined for this study. Each book is part of the Broadening Access to Books on Texas and Oklahoma collection made available through the Oklahoma Historical Society's digital archives. These books were originally published as print books, went out of print sometime during the twentieth century, and were preserved as e-books for public use in 2017. The collection was made available as part of a Humanities Open Book Program grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Research questions focused on subject areas, last print dates, non-fiction categories, and time periods covered.

R1. When was the last printing of the out-of-print books on Oklahoma and Texas history converted into e-book format by the Oklahoma History Center? What period of time do they cover?

For the purposes of this study, it was assumed that each of the twenty-two books in the collection was last published during the twentieth century.

According to the archive's records, publication dates range from 1976 to 1996, a period of twenty years. Spot-checking the title pages of some of the books also confirmed these data. See Figure 1 for a graph depicting frequencies of decades of the most recent printing of the books in the collection.

Figure 1. Decade of Most Recent Printing



The time periods covered in each of the books showed a wide distribution of the range of years. Each record in the archive lists a covered time period, starting with a generic description of the time period and a range of years. The records also list another range of years under the heading "Coverage Date." The range of years under the heading "Covered Time Period" was part of the data collection for this study. The years covered range from 1690 to the late 1980s; Figure 2 depicts frequencies of the century ranges covered by each book.

R2. How many of the e-books could be categorized within each of the following types of non-fiction: biography, technical guides or handbooks, or expository?

In order to determine each book's non-fiction category, data from the archive's records were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and categorized according to the types listed in the research question stated previously. The most prominent type of non-fiction book was expository, with eleven books total in that category. There were eight biographies and/or autobiographies and three technical guides or handbooks (Figure 3).

Figure 2. Century Range of Book Content

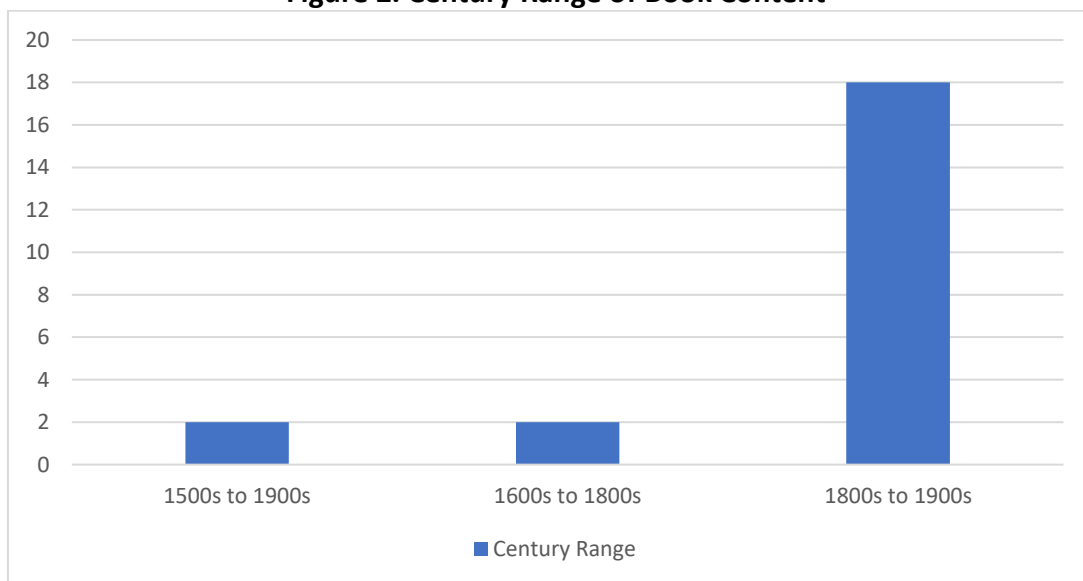


Figure 3. Non-Fiction Category

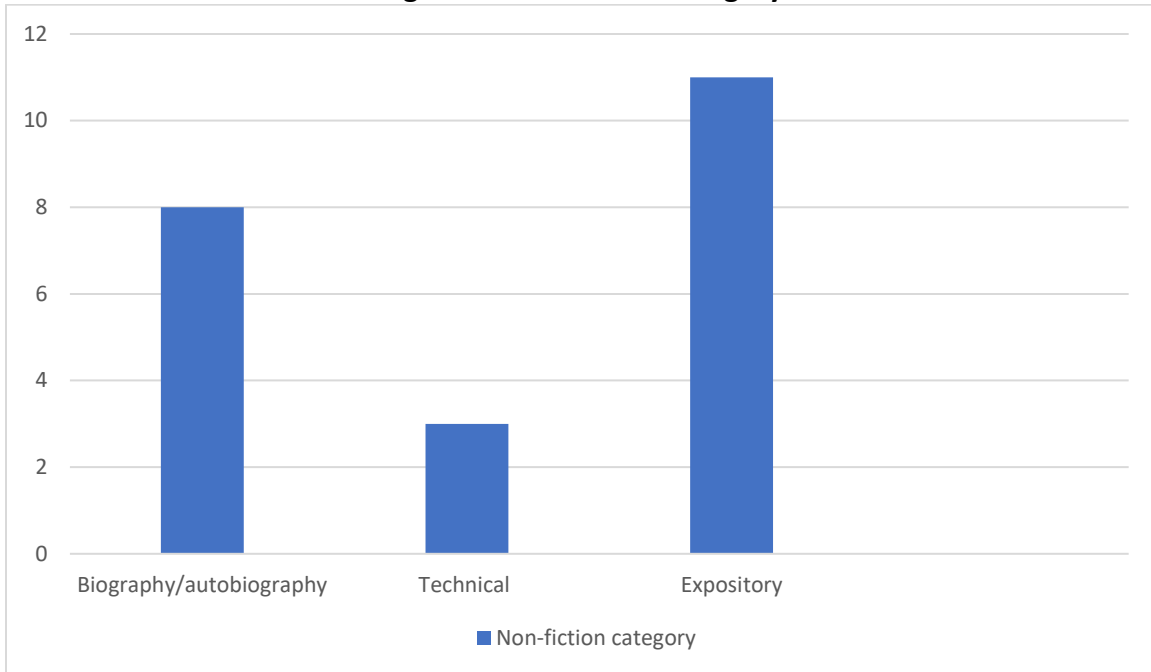
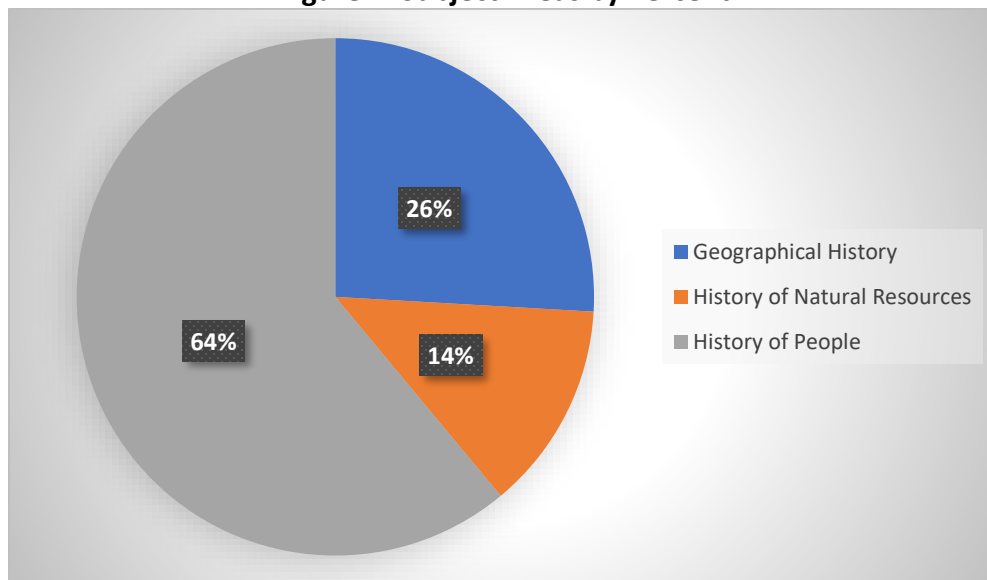


Figure 4. Subject Areas by Percent



R3. How many of the e-books could be categorized within the following subject areas: geographical history, history of natural resources, history of people?

Looking again at the data from the archive's records, each book's subject area was entered into an Excel spreadsheet then converted into a table, dividing each into the three categories listed in the research question: geographical history, history of natural resources, and history of people. Out of the twenty-

two books in the collection, fourteen (64%) books were on the history of people, including Native American tribes, explorers, and state governors. Six of the books (27%) were on geographical history, including metropolitan areas and Indian reservations. Three of the books (14%) were on the history of natural resources, including farming, mining, and oil (Figure 4).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Results from the study indicate that most of the publications in the collection were most recently printed in the 1970s and 1980s. The majority of these materials also covered the period of the 1800s to the 1900s, were expository or biographies, and were histories of people or geography.

The fact that most of the books were most recently printed in the 1970s or 1980s rather than the 1990s or 2000s indicates that the archivists of the Oklahoma Historical Society probably thought the printed materials that were last printed in the 1980s or before were most in need of digital preservation. It is likely that because these books may never be printed again and various people had handled them since their last printing for close to two decades, that the materials were beginning to show wear.

In reference to the historical periods covered in the books, it is likely that the authors for some subjects only had reliable information for the 1800s to 1900s, but also most of the recorded history in Oklahoma and Texas occurred in this period. Various facts and statistics listed in these books may have changed or been updated since their last printing and will therefore be considered out-of-date, but even obsolete information is important to preserve because it provides a perspective on what information was deemed important at the time of authorship or actual event. In addition, having access to out-of-print materials in e-book format allows historians and researchers to find information that may not be widely circulated or available to them locally.

Expository or biographical books attempt to inform or explain various topics such as people, places, or things. Most of the books analyzed were expository or biographical and were histories of people or geography. The writers discussed significant people such as Will Rogers, early Oklahoma governors, Native Americans, and Oklahoma's political and economic geography, such as Indian territory boundaries, reservations set up in the 1800s, mining, and farming. Most of the significant history of Oklahoma is in the people present at the time the

region was part of the American frontier and was significant to the stories told of that era.

The Oklahoma Historical Society's preservation of out-of-print historical materials in electronic form is a valuable resource to researchers of Oklahoma history. Such materials need to be preserved not just for the sake of storing information but also for providing a window into the history of a region or culture that is closer to the time of the event. History often is changed with the telling, and the longer the time elapsed since the event, the more secondary and less reliable sources tend to be. Preserving older, out-of-print sources provides a way for the voices of those who lived the history – or at least close to the era – to continue to be heard. In addition, electronic preservation provides a means for the materials to be accessed by patrons who are unable to access them locally.

Future research on this collection could focus on content analysis to determine subjects for keyword searches, publication history beyond the most recent publication date, and any differences between editions. Also, as the Oklahoma Historical Society expands the e-book collection, a study such as this one could be replicated to update the results of this study. Any researchers who are looking to complete a state history project should access collections similar to this one held by the state's historical society.

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