

Tales from the Archives

Albertsons Library holds true gems of Idaho's history

In a quiet corner of Boise State's Albertsons Library, the remains of pitched political battles over Idaho's wilderness now rest silently in cardboard boxes. Photographs and articles once used to lure far-away tourists to Idaho now fill only filing cabinets.

Welcome to BSU's Special Collections, more commonly known as the archives, where shelves full of priceless documents stand ready to tell the story of Idaho.

Special Collections director Alan Virta says many of the library's 100 collections focus on the Idaho landscape.

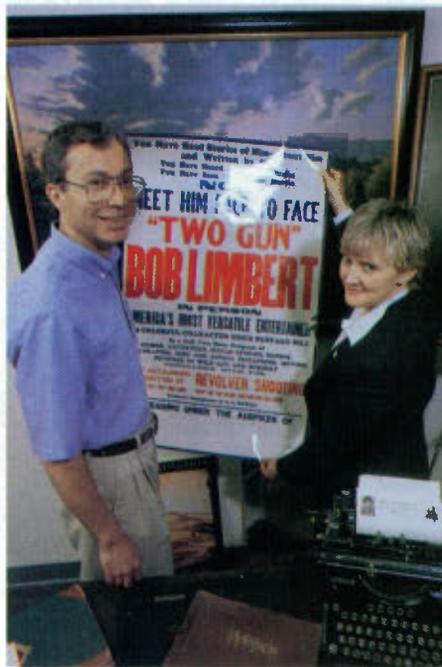
"The collection is built around our strength, which is obviously material about Idaho and the West," says Virta. "And being a state where land and natural resources have played such an important role, it is only natural that those topics are very prominent in our collection."

The flagship collection came from the late U.S. Sen. Frank Church, who had a hand in practically every federal land issue that concerned Idaho from 1956-80. He was the author of federal legislation that set aside portions of Idaho for wilderness designation as well as legislation that protected several Idaho rivers from development.

Special Collections also holds the papers of U.S. Sen. Len Jordan, who worked on many of the same issues as Church.

In some cases, such as wilderness designation for the Sawtooth Mountains, the collections provide differing Church-Jordan approaches. Taken together, they are valuable to researchers because they tell the story from both sides of the political aisle, says Virta.

Two years ago, BSU also received the papers of former Gov. Cecil Andrus, who came to office in 1970 vowing to protect the White Cloud area in central Idaho from mining. Later, as U.S. Secretary of the Interior, he extended federal protection to the Snake River Birds of Prey



Archivists Alan Virta and Mary Carter.

area and expanded the Alaskan wilderness.

"If people take the time to look, they can find some fascinating stories behind many of the tourist attractions we take for granted,"

says Virta. "The archives tell us about the important decisions that made Idaho what it is today."

But the archives contain more than political history. One of the most colorful characters whose past now rests on the shelves is "Two-Gun" Bob Limbert, who was a one-man department of tourism for Idaho in the 1920s and '30s. Limbert was one of the first to photograph the Sawtooth Mountains, Craters of the Moon and Bruneau River. He personally lobbied Congress and the president for federal protection for the Craters of the Moon.

His photos and other memorabilia provide rare glimpses into a pristine Idaho that was on the verge of discovery, says Virta.

The collection continues to grow. Most recently, the library received 300 pieces of personal correspondence from Idaho author Vardis Fisher to his son Grant. Those letters, says Virta, provide a heretofore unknown glimpse at the personal affairs of the Hagerman farmer-writer whose book *Mountain Man* was the basis for the 1972 film *Jeremiah Johnson* starring Robert Redford.

The recently-added collection from the Wolf Education and Research Center has already drawn the attention of researchers.

The archives are important, says Virta,

because they add a research dimension to the library. "These are single-source documents ... the only place they can be found is here," he adds.

The collections are attracting a growing stream of researchers, Virta says.

What are they searching for? Information on everything from Snake River water rights to migrant workers to photos for television documentaries. The archives are also used by students researching term papers.

The material in the archives is summarized on the World Wide Web site at <http://library.idbsu.edu/specol/index.htm> □

Special Collection Highlights

In capsule form, here are highlights of the special collections that relate to Idaho and its landscape.

- Gov. Cecil Andrus—Salmon and nuclear waste.
- Sen. Frank Church—Sawtooth and River of No Return wilderness areas, Hells Canyon and wild and scenic rivers.
- Marshall Edson, Boise conservationist—Logging, salmon and Idaho Wildlife Federation.
- Fred Hutchison, environmental assistant to Sen. Church—Wilderness and public lands.
- Sen. Len Jordan—Sawtooth wilderness.
- Rep. Larry LaRocco—Birds of Prey area and salmon.

- Robert Limbert, explorer, photographer, promoter of Idaho—3,000 photos, publications, etc. on Sawtooths, Craters of Moon and Bruneau River.

- Edward Rhodenbaugh, geologist and professor—Pioneer research on geology of Idaho.

- Thomas Stanford, Carey sheep rancher—Grazing in Craters of the Moon.

- Ted Trueblood, conservationist/writer from Nampa—Research materials, field notes, photos for publications in *Field and Stream*, *Outdoor Life* and others.

- Wolf Education and Research Center—Wolf reintroduction in central Idaho.