

## **Lawton Public Library Business Plan for Family and Local History Room**

### **Overview**

The Lawton Public Library's (LPL) Family and Local History Room is one of the largest and most extensive collections in Oklahoma. The collection dates back to December 1976 with a donation from the newly formed Southwest Oklahoma Genealogical Society (SWOGS). The collection grew rapidly. In 1979, a dedicated research room was created and a genealogical librarian hired. The Lawton Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) and the local chapter of the Daughters of 1812 research collections were added at this time. Collection of local historical and Native American material began to be collected in the 1990s. To house the growing material, the research room has been expanded several times, with the last expansion occurring in 2014.

The Family and Local History Room houses a collection consisting of over 27,000 books, numerous periodicals, 150,000 microfiche, 6,000 rolls of microfilm, 3 databases, with an adjacent Digital Memory Center. The scope of the collection is family and local history including states east and north of Oklahoma with an emphasis on southwest Oklahoma, and the Kiowa, Comanche and Apache (KCA) Indian tribes.

LPL serves the citizens of both Lawton and Comanche County. The collection is utilized, however, by genealogists, historians, students, Native Americans, local heritage, historical and genealogical societies, and the general public, both, local and nationwide. The room receives numerous in-person visitors from around the United States each year.

### **Novak Report**

In November 2020, the Novak Report identified the need to develop a business plan for family history and genealogy services within the library.

### **Stakeholders**

The Family and Local History Room has a strong partnership with the Southwest Oklahoma Genealogical Society, a 501(c)3 nonprofit. The society helped start the collection and has actively supported its growth. They have procured several grants from the McMahon Foundation which added several thousand books, microfilm and equipment. The partnership also includes producing publications and a quarterly journal, exchanging journals and other publications with other societies, hosting monthly meetings and planning special events.

Additional important affiliates are the Daughters of the American Revolution and the local Daughters of 1812. The Friends of the Lawton Public Library, Inc. which is a 501(c)3, is a vital advocate and funding source for LPL. Other partnerships include the Cameron University History Department and the Southwestern Oklahoma Historical Society of which the Head of Family and Local History is currently a board member.

The library also has a track record of collaborating with the Museum of the Great Plains. The museum can be counted as a key stakeholder in future endeavors.

### **Terminology & Scope**

Even though the room was established as the Jeannie McCutcheon Family History Room in 1979, library staff have not been consistent in identifying the room. Many times, library staff have used

the term genealogy to refer to the room and its services. The Family and Local History Room provides much broader services.

The terms genealogy and family history are often used interchangeably, but family history is technically a broader term and is more reflective of the current collection. Genealogy is the study of the lines of descent and is therefore a key sub-component of family history. Local history is the history of a specific place – it includes family history, but that is it is only a part of that.

Many people assume that the room is simply a collection of local genealogy, but it has a bigger footprint than that. The genealogical material is national in scope. The library is also the repository of local history.

The library needs to be consistent in its terminology and how it brands itself.

### **Marketing**

In addition to being more consistent in how library staff identify the room, they recognize that they need to better market their services and resources. Staff have shifted focus and are striving to increase accessibility and exposure to the information. The library needs to continue to foster interest in local history. One key way to do this is to find ways to connect people to their history, both family and place. To bring in new people, library staff need more digitized information. Staff are already moving in this direction with the local legends bookmarks and other activities. Another initiative is the recently created Digital Memory Center. This center allows family histories, photos, mementos, and research to be digitally preserved. It is located adjacent to the Family and Local History Room.

### **Technology & Digitization**

The future is heavily influenced by technology. Digitization is expected. This includes keyword searching, optical character recognition, and multiple exporting capabilities. Researchers expects online access from home whenever possible.

To meet this expectation, the library plans to digitize as many records as feasible. A move in this direction was made in the 1990s when the library partnered with the FamilySearch in Salt Lake City, to microfilm selected prime local genealogical records, such as early marriages, probates, pioneer church records, cemetery records, etc. This is part of their program to preserve the genealogically relevant records of the world. FamilySearch is now digitizing many of these microfilmed records and placing them on their website.

FamilySearch microfilmed and is digitizing a small portion of our local genealogical records, but they did not work on local history material, such as newspapers. This task falls to LPL. The library is currently pursuing grants to digitize the Lawton Constitution microfilm. As time goes on, the library will identify other local records to digitize. Digitizing microfilm and other material takes time and money.

### **Sustainability**

There will always be a demand for family and local history. Accessibility through technology will become even more important to stay relevant.

While the family history collection is one of the best in Oklahoma, there is a lot of potential and room for growth of the local history collection. There is a community need for a robust research

collection. As Lawton is the county seat for Comanche County, LPL is the logical place to maintain such a collection.

The family history collection needs to be maintained and relevant material added as they become available. Several more commercial databases, such as Newspapers.com and American Ancestors, should be added.

*From the Technology Plan: The Family History Librarian will identify unique local history that is not readily available to the public and is not being maintained by other agencies (i.e. the museum, state library, courthouse) and explore how to digitize this information. (ongoing)*

### **Succession Planning**

The Family and Local History Room had 1.5 full-time employee (FTE). Due to budget cuts, there is 1 FTE, the Head of Family and Local History. Much of her time is spent cataloging material. To provide continuity of service and increase customer engagement, the library should hire a full-time family and local history associate as a step to succession planning.

When the current librarian retires, the library hopes to hire a family history librarian/archivist with technology experience. It is expected that there will be qualified candidates when the library does a regional job search seeking such a librarian.

To have a successful research room, staff need to offer a personal touch. Research is laborious and people need assistance navigating resources.

### **Evolving Priorities & Future Services**

The library has always included local history in its mission but staff recognize that they have not emphasized the local history component enough. An example of one area of need is an online Comanche County digital photo collection.

It has become obvious that there is a need for a local history research center and more locally produced material. The focus needs to continue to shift in this direction. A more formalized research center would make local history easily accessible for the Lawton/Comanche County.

### **Vision for the Future**

Most communities have a genealogy collection. While having this collection in the main public library is common, another popular service model is having it as a separate space. This allows for more security, provides a more conducive research environment, and offers more storage space.

There is a potential opportunity to convert Lawton's old Carnegie Library into a Family and Local History Library and Research Center. The center would collect and archive material, and make it easily accessible to the public. The center would contain the library's current Family and Local History Room collection as well as a small archives containing Lawton and Comanche County material. It would become a branch library and will receive library support.

As a side point, the Museum of the Great Plains houses some local history but its mission is much broader in scope: "explore the human history of the Great Plains."

The center would need to be staffed by a minimum of two staff members. Community volunteers would also be needed. Key stakeholder support would be needed to move this project forward.

LPL recognizes that a Family and Local History Library and Research Center may be part of a bigger vision of a joint-use facility.

The Stephens County Genealogy Library is currently in a separate location and is considered a branch of the Duncan Public Library. This format is a good case study for LPL to utilize.

### **Local Archives**

The archives would contain important documents, manuscripts, photos and other material relevant to the study of Lawton/Comanche County history. Collections currently available include those of Lily Stafford, Hugh Corwin, Towana Spivey, and the Southwestern Oklahoma Historical Society. Additional relevant collections would be identified and procured when possible. The archives would be small and limited in nature. No attempt would be made to “collect everything pertaining to Lawton and Comanche County history.” Part of the archives would consist of a newly created digital collection of Lawton and Comanche County historical photographs.

Included in the archives would be already library owned genealogy collections, such as the Dr. Melton P. Meek Collection of Southern Genealogy. The Melton P. Meek collection is considered by many professional genealogists as one of the largest and best Southern collection in the country.

### **Funding**

Funding for a Family and Local History Room has been a combination of city library budget, grants, and donations from the Southwest Oklahoma Genealogical Society. It is anticipated that funding for a future research center/archives would be from the same sources with addition funding from the Southwestern Oklahoma Historical Society and any grants that may be obtained. City staff have a track records of pursuing grant funding as appropriate. Besides city library staff, the center also hopes to have History Department interns from Cameron University.

### **FamilySearch Affiliate**

FamilySearch’s Family History Library in Salt Lake City houses the world’s largest collection of family history material, containing over 2.4 million rolls of microfilm records from all over the globe. They are in the process of digitizing these records, many of which are restricted access and not available on their website. LPL may possibly become an FamilySearch Affiliate. This allows researchers to receive access to over 350 million restricted images, which would greatly enhance the research possibilities available at our library. FamilySearch also provides over 600 online classes that the library could offer its customers. There is no fee or charge to become an affiliate library.

### **Developing Strategies**

This document is the first step in developing a strategy for the Family and Local History Room. The Family and Local History Room is as relevant to the community today as it was when it was created. LPL and its library board will continue to monitor current trends and opportunities and build relationships with stakeholders of local history to develop viable solutions for the future.

### **Recommendation #1**

The Library Board recommends marketing and branding everything consistently as “Family and Local History Room” and actively find ways to connect and engage the community in family and local history through activities and research.

**Recommendation #2**

The Library Board recommends partnering with the Southwestern Oklahoma Historical Society to create an online Comanche County digital photo collection.

**Recommendation #3**

The Library Board recommends partnering with the Southwestern Oklahoma Historical Society to provide a Family and Local History Library and Research Center containing a small archival component which would become a new branch library. As a genealogy group, SWOGS would assist in the creation and support of the branch. A physical location for the branch would need to be obtained.

**Recommendation #4**

The Library Board recommends restoring and expanding staffing levels for the family and local history room. Additional staff would allow the room to be manned during all hours the library is open. Currently, the room is unmanned during evenings and on Saturdays. In the short-term, a full-time genealogy associate to help with succession planning is needed. For the long-term, LPL should hire a family history librarian/archivist.

**Recommendation #5**

The Library Board recommends identifying and digitizing collections as appropriate and as funding is available. This includes purchasing equipment to perform the work and/or outsourcing the tasks.

**Recommendation #6**

The Library Board recommends exploring becoming a FamilySearch affiliate.

**Board Approval**

This document was reviewed & approved by Lawton Public Library Board on 2/9/22.

## Appendix A: Novak Extract

This is an extract of the Novak Report that was presented to City Council in November 2020. The full report is 274 pages. This section is in reference to Genealogy and Family History.

### **Recommendation 55: Develop a business plan for family history and genealogy services within the Library.**

The Library's family history room is reported by Library staff to house the premier genealogical and family history collection in Oklahoma. This collection includes the combined holdings of the Southwest Oklahoma Genealogical Society, the Lawton chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and contributions to the Library from several organizations, including the Daughters of 1812, the Southwest Oklahoma Historical Society, and Native American heritage groups. These collections are managed by a full-time genealogy librarian, with part-time support provided by a worker from the AARP Foundation's Senior Community Service Employment Program. This individual is not a City employee but instead is paid and employed by the AARP Foundation for a limited term of employment.

The success of the family history room is largely attributable to the strong partnership between the Library and the Southwest Oklahoma Genealogical Society (SWOGS). In addition to contributing materials for the collection, SWOGS members assist individual patrons with genealogical research and provide monthly programming for the community related to local history and genealogical research. Staff report declining membership in SWOGS and concerns about the organization's long-term sustainability. In addition, the genealogy librarian has served in this role for over 30 years and is eligible for retirement. These factors combined put the long-term viability and success of the family history and genealogy services provided by the Library at risk.

In its 2020-2022 Strategic Plan, one of the Library's six strategic goals is to "provide the best genealogy center in the state of Oklahoma."<sup>88</sup> While this is a commendable goal, it fails to address the longer-term concern about the ultimate viability of the family history and genealogy program. Before additional resources are dedicated to bolstering current genealogy offerings, the Library should first develop a business plan for the family history and genealogy program with the input of SWOGS, the Library Board, and other stakeholder groups. The Library should evaluate whether it is able to continue to meet the family history and genealogy needs of the community if or when SWOGS and the long-time genealogy librarian are no longer available to support these functions. This business plan should include an inventory of current services provided and community needs that they meet, goals for future services and offerings, and the development of strategies and partnerships to achieve those goals. This work should be started immediately so that the current genealogy librarian can provide input and advice on succession planning and future staffing.

#### **Lawton Public Library**

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| 52 | Update and formalize the Library organizational structure.                               |
| 53 | Develop a cross-training plan for Library staff.   |
| 54 | Assess the business case for operating the Branch Library.                               |
| 55 | Develop a business plan for family history and genealogy services within the Library.    |
| 56 | Train employees on best practices for serving Library patrons experiencing homelessness. |

## Appendix B: Current Services and Needs Met

### Current Services

Provides information and reference material on Family, Lawton, Comanche County and Oklahoma history.

Provides awareness and understanding of Family, Lawton and Comanche County history.

Protects and preserves the heritage of Lawton and Comanche County.

Offers in library free access to popular subscription websites such as Ancestry and Fold3.

Provides family history research material for the Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache tribes, some of which is available to the public nowhere else.

Provides a trained genealogist/historian to assist those tracing their family roots.

Provides library created local history and Native American online databases.

Provides lookup services in genealogical and local historical records.

Provides public research training through monthly programs, workshops and special events.

Assists city government with local history research.

Located adjacent to the Family History Room is the Digital Memory Center which allows family histories, photos, mementos, and research to be digitally preserved.

### Community Needs Met

Research Assistance

Advocacy & Education

Sustainability & Legacy  
Local Pride

Research Information

Native American Research

Research Assistance

Native American Research

Research Assistance

Professional Assistance

Research Assistance

Modern Technology & Accessibility

## Appendix C: Notable Resources in Collection

### Original Published Material:

- The Tree Tracers, a quarterly family history journal
- 80 publications dealing with Southwest and Oklahoma genealogy; these books include cemetery, marriage, newspaper, Native American, military, and other records
- County History Book, created and published by SWOGS
- Printed Sources for the Oklahoma Genealogical and Historical Research, which was compiled by the library's Family and Local History Librarian.

### The Family and Local History Room includes:

- Comanche County genealogical records (marriage, divorce, wills, cemetery school census, pioneer churches, etc.)
- local and area newspapers from 1901 to current
- Federal census schedules
- Indian-Pioneer History Collection
- Native American records, particularly Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache
- Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War records
- family histories
- Oklahoma Tract Books with surname index, and research reference aids
- 1890 Oklahoma Territorial Census
- Freedman's Bank Records
- Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies and Navies
- Southern Historical Society Papers
- New Netherlands Collection
- Royal Ancestors Collection
- Indexes to First Landowners of Pennsylvania, and Early Connecticut Vital Records (the Barbour Collection and more)

### The Family and Local History Room has three databases:

- Ancestry
- Fold3
- Newsbank



## **Appendix D: Family and Local History Room Digitization Projects**

Several of the digitization projects completed or in process by library staff, SWOGS members, and volunteers include:

- Lawton High School yearbooks
- The Native American Obituary Collection and index
- The Comanche County Biographical Index
- Lawton newspapers
- a collection of wedding anniversary and birthday announcements (50+ years of age)

## **Appendix E: See Also**

2022-2024 Lawton Public Library Technology Plan: <https://www.lawtonok.gov/lawton-public-library-advisory-board>

2022-2024 Lawton Public Library Strategic Plan: <https://www.lawtonok.gov/lawton-public-library-advisory-board>

Collection Development – Family & Local History Policy: <https://www.lawtonok.gov/lawton-public-library-advisory-board>