Oral Histories of the 1959 Oregon State College Wrestling Court, 1983-2013

Overview of the Collection

Creator  Backen, Brittany A.
Title    Oral Histories of the 1959 Oregon State College Wrestling Court
Dates    1983-2013 (inclusive)
          1983 2013
          2013 (bulk)
          2013 2013
Quantity 0.01 cubic feet, (1 box)
          130 MB born digital
Collection Number OH 27
Summary  The 1959 Oregon State College Wrestling Court oral history collection consists of born digital audio files and transcripts, as well as supporting research materials compiled by OSU undergraduate student Brittany Backen in her research on the wrestling court and the controversy that it provoked. The collection includes interviews with members of the court, the former editor of the OSC Daily Barometer, and a former member of the 1959 wrestling team.
Repository Oregon State University Libraries, Special Collections and Archives Research Center
            Special Collections and Archives Research Center
            121 The Valley Library
            Oregon State University
            Corvallis OR
            97331-4501
            Telephone: 541-737-2075
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Access Restrictions Collection is open for research.
Languages English

Historical Note

In 1959 coach Dale Thomas and his Oregon State College wrestling team devised the idea of creating a wrestling court to promote the upcoming Pacific Coast Intercollegiate Wrestling Tournament, to be held in Corvallis. Wrestler Ken Noteboom selected twenty-nine female students for potential inclusion in the court. Noteboom and other members of the team interviewed all twenty-nine women, chose seven, and gave them titles based on wrestling objectives - titles which might also be construed to have sexually suggestive meanings. Carol Lindbloom was "Miss Time Advantage," Susan E. Hall "Miss Takedown," Mary Ann Backen "Miss Predicament," Carol Scott "Miss Fall," Suzanne Chapman "Miss Near Fall," Sharon Ransom "Miss Reversal," and Janet Aune "Miss Escape."
At the time, it was not unusual to use women to publicize college athletics and draw crowds for events. Controversy arose however, when the women were asked to pose for photos in bathing suits, wearing sashes bearing their titles, during a time when women at OSC were bound by a strict dress code requiring them to wear long skirts and high-necked tops. In response to the photographs, Oregon State College President August Strand placed a public ban on promotional "cheesecake" photographs for athletics. ("Cheesecake" was a common term used to describe pictures of women wearing little clothing, though still enough as to remain publicly acceptable for advertisement purposes.)

President Strand's ban caught the attention of the national media, and an article referencing the controversy appeared in the March 30, 1959 issue of *Life Magazine*, which featured the controversial swimsuit photo of the wrestling court as well as another image of the court wearing dress code compliant clothing and walking with President Strand on the OSC campus. The March 30, 1959 issue of *Sports Illustrated* also reported on the wrestling court, and its successful promotion of the Oregon State wrestling team, in an article titled "Really Nothing Like A Dame." These and other articles prompted numerous men in the United States and beyond to send letters to members of the court, requesting photos, expressing their support of the wrestling court and, in some cases, proposing marriage.

In her paper, Backen concludes that the 1959 wrestling court was not just about "coed cheesecake" and drawing crowds to wrestling events. Rather, the court represented one of numerous opportunities for female students to demonstrate their marriageability in a time when becoming the idealized post-war wife was a goal for many women. Backen argues that the wrestling court was comprised of women who were each trying to reach their own personal goals and, based on their own accounts, they largely succeeded.

Capsule biographies of individuals interviewed by Brittany Backen for her project are as follows:

Janet (Aune) Essig, "Miss Escape," was raised in Milwaukee, Oregon and Oak Grove, Oregon. She graduated from Oregon State in 1961 with an Education degree. While at Oregon State she pledged with Alpha Chi Omega sorority and was Miss November in the 1959 Sigma Delta Chi calendar.

Mary Ann (Backen) Hogan, "Miss Predicament," grew up in Roseburg, Oregon. At Oregon State she pledged with Pi Beta Phi sorority and majored in Education. Mary Ann, along with her sister Linda, was Miss June in the 1960 Sigma Delta Chi calendar.

Carol (Lindbloom) Hamlin, "Miss Time Advantage," was born and raised in Roseburg, Oregon. While attending Oregon State College she majored in Liberal Arts and pledged with Pi Beta Phi sorority. She also served on the Prom and Homecoming Courts, and was a Sweetheart of Sigma Chi.

Sharon (Ransom) Reid, "Miss Reversal," was born and raised in Albany, Oregon. At Oregon State she pledged with Alpha Chi Omega sorority and majored in Business Education. She graduated in 1962.

Kenneth W. Noteboom grew up in Salem, Oregon. At Oregon State he was a member of the wrestling team and was the 1959 senior class president. He graduated in the same year with a degree in Agricultural Education.

Charles (Chuck) R. Wenstrom attended Oregon State after returning from service in Korea. He was the manager of the football team, a member of Sigma Delta Chi fraternity and the Veteran's Club, and editor of the *Daily Barometer*. He studied physical education, journalism and social studies.

Members of the wrestling court not interviewed:
Susan (Hall) Tyler, "Miss Takedown," was born in Santa Monica, California in 1938. While attending Oregon State she majored in science, graduating in 1960. She also held the title of Miss OSC in 1959.

Carol (Scott) Lehmann, "Miss Fall" and queen of the wrestling court, was born in Albany, California in 1937. At Oregon State she majored in Home Economics, graduating in 1959.

Suzanne (Chapman) Davis, "Miss Near Fall," was born in Mason City, Washington in 1939. At Oregon State she studied in the School of Business and Technology, graduating in 1961. She was Miss May 1960 in the Sigma Delta Chi calendar, and held the title of Rose of Pi Kappa Phi in 1959.

Content Description

The Oral Histories of the 1959 Oregon State College Wrestling Court collection consists of materials created and assembled by Brittany Backen for her research paper "Coed Cheesecake': The 1959 Wrestling Court and the Politics of the Marriage Market at Oregon State College," submitted in December 2013 for the course "HST 407 - Untold History of OSU," taught by Ben Mutschler. Backen's paper received the Library Undergraduate Research Award in May 2014 and garnered Honorable Mention OSU Undergraduate Research Student of the Year Award honors for its author.

The collection includes audio and transcripts for six born digital interviews conducted in 2013 by Backen with four members of the 1959 wrestling court - Carol Hamlin, Maryann Hogan, Sharon Reid, and Janet Essig - as well as former wrestler Ken Noteboom, and former editor of the Daily Barometer Chuck Wenstrom. In addition to born digital sound recordings and transcripts, collection materials include pdf scans of release agreements, research materials and Backen's final paper; newspaper clippings and correspondence; and photocopies of Life Magazine and Sports Illustrated articles featuring the 1959 wrestling court as well as the Sigma Delta Chi 1959-1960 school year calendar and other materials documenting the 1959 OSC wrestling team.

Sound files were originally created in .m4a and .wav formats which were then converted to .mp3 access files. All born digital materials are stored on the Special Collections & Archives Research Center file server.

Use of the Collection

Preferred Citation

Oral Histories of the 1959 Oregon State College Wrestling Court (OH 27), Oregon State University Special Collections & Archives Research Center, Corvallis, Oregon.

Administrative Information

Arrangement

The materials described in this collection have been arranged into two series - one consists of the collection's interviews and transcripts and a second the additional primary source materials gathered by Brittany Backen in support of her research project. An alphabetical view of the oral history interviewees whose recordings and transcripts are held in this collection is as follows:

(Aune) Essig, Janet (October 31, 2013)
Acquisition Information

Collection materials were donated to the Special Collections & Archives Research Center by Brittany Backen in April 2014.

Related Materials

Materials documenting a different controversy involving Dale Thomas and the OSU wrestling program are held in the Ed Ferguson Oregon Anti-Apartheid Scrapbook (MSS Apartheid). Research on the history of wrestling at Oregon State may be conducted in the Intercollegiate Athletics Records (RG 007), the Sports Media Guides (PUB 054) and the Oregon State University Memorabilia Collection. Historic images of wrestling at Oregon State are held in the Intercollegiate Athletics Photographic Collection (P 031), the James G. Arbuthnot Photograph Collection (P 191), the John L. Robbins Photographs (P 295), the Claud L. Booth Photograph Album (P 300), Harriet's Photograph Collection (P HC) and the News and Communication Services Motion Picture Films and Videotapes (FV P 057).

The Special Collections & Archives Research Center holds hundreds of collections reflecting the experiences of women students at Oregon State. Collections that incorporate a focus on changes in women's roles at the university include the Associated Students of OSU Records (RG 011), President's Commission on the Status of Women Records (RG 159) and Women's Center Records (RG 243). The Associated Women Students Scrapbook (MSS AWS), Dean of Women's Office Records (RG 057) and Photographs (P 097) are also collections of interest.

An interview with Janet Essig’s husband, Don Essig, is held in the Oregon State University Sesquicentennial Oral History Collection (OH 26). The research paper created by Brittany Backen as a result of this project is available in ScholarsArchive@OSU.

Detailed Description of the Collection

The following section contains a detailed listing of the materials in the collection.

Series I: Interview Audio and Transcripts, 2013

8 sound files, (101 MB born digital)
All interviews were conducted by Brittany Backen. Specific interview topics are included below.

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Description</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Aune) Essig, Janet</td>
<td>October 31, 2013</td>
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Essig discusses OSC, her major in Education, classes, living on campus, being part of a sorority, and campus activities. She also discusses the selection process for the 1959 wrestling court, President Strand's reaction to the swimsuit photographs and the resulting controversy, and Dean of Women Helen Moor’s reaction to the photographs. Essig also notes her own family's
<table>
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<th>Description</th>
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<td>response to the controversy and the pictures printed in the media, and details her life after OSC. Interview conducted in Eugene, Oregon.</td>
<td>November 2, 2013</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| (Backen) Hogan, Mary Ann
Hogan discusses her childhood, her decision to attend Oregon State College, campus life, being part of a sorority, and titles she held in high school and at OSC. She also recounts Ken Noteboom approaching her about being in the wrestling court, the candidate interview and selection process, the swimsuit photo shoot, and reactions to the pictures both on and off campus. She also speaks of her life after graduating from OSC in 1960. Interview conducted in Bend, Oregon. | |
| (Ransom) Reid, Sharon
Reid discusses her childhood growing up in Albany, Oregon, majoring in Business Education at Oregon State College, engaging in activities on campus with her sorority, and her decision to join the wrestling court. She also discusses her memories of Dale Thomas, Helen Moor and August Strand. Interview conducted in Albany, Oregon. | November 4, 2013 |
| (Lindbloom) Hamlin, Carol
Hamlin discusses her childhood growing up in Roseburg, Oregon, her decision to attend Oregon State College, activities her sorority was involved with on campus, education, and her memories of the wrestling court, including the selection process. She also relays her views on the wrestling court, the reactions of her family and on campus to the swimsuit photos, and the court's receiving letters after the photos were published in national magazines. Interview conducted in Medford, Oregon. | November 9, 2013 |
| Noteboom, Ken
Noteboom discusses his decision to attend Oregon State College, his major and classes at OSC, his involvement in wrestling, and his coach, Dale Thomas. He recounts the idea and creation of the wrestling court, including the processes for selecting women to interview and choosing the seven women that made up the court. He also discusses life after graduating, coordinating class reunions, reunions of the 1959 wrestling court, and serving on the wrestling endowment board. Interview conducted at Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon. | November 11, 2013 |
| Wenstrom, Chuck
Wenstrom discusses his relationship with President Strand and Strand's professional background, Strand's objection to hosting the Pacific Coast Intercollegiate Wrestling Tournament, and Dale Thomas's role in bringing the tournament to Corvallis. He also notes the path that he took to becoming a student at Oregon State, his activities as a student including his involvement with the *Barometer*, his memories of the wrestling court, and its reception on campus. Interview conducted at Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon. | November 11, 2013 |

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http://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org/ark:/80444/xv24179
Series II: Supporting Research Materials, 1983-2013

1 folder
29 MB born digital
Series II consists of both paper materials and born digital items documenting the wrestling court controversy, a later wrestling court assembled in 1984, and reunions of the original court in 1989 and 2009.

Digital contents include a pdf version of Brittany Backen's final paper, "'Coed Cheesecake': The 1959 Wrestling Court and the Politics of the Marriage Market at Oregon State College," (also available online) as well as scans of research materials that she gathered - including many of the paper materials held in Series II - and signed permissions forms for each of her interview subjects.

Paper contents include photocopied magazine articles and newspaper clippings contemporary to the wrestling court controversy, as well as newspaper clippings noting a 1989 reunion of the court. Additional print materials of note include photocopied of the Sigma Delta Chi Calendar for the 1959-1960 school year, which featured three members of the original wrestling court; photocopied of correspondence written to Janet Aune from various men in reaction to the 1959 Life Magazine and Sports Illustrated articles; a wrestling score card and photocopied of the 1984 PAC-10 Conference Wrestling tournament program, which included pictures of the 1959 and 1984 wrestling courts.

An invitation to attend the annual "Oregon State Wrestling Homecoming" held in Corvallis, January 28-29, 1984, is available in the series, as is correspondence from Ken Noteboom to Janet Essig expressing thanks for attending the homecoming event. Also included is a photocopy of a letter, dated March 23, 2009, from Janet Essig to the other members of the 1959 wrestling court, regarding a proposed group reunion in Corvallis.

Container(s) Description Dates
Box

Names and Subjects

Subject Terms:
Student activities--Oregon--Corvallis.
Women--Education (Higher)--Oregon--Corvallis.
Wrestling--Oregon--Corvallis.

Personal Names:
Strand, A. L. (August Leroy), 1894-
Thomas, Dale Oren, 1923-

Corporate Names:
Oregon State College--Wrestling.

Form or Genre Terms:
Oral histories (document genres)

Other Creators:

Personal Names:
Essig, Janet Aune.
(interviewee)
Hamlin, Carol Lindbloom.
(interviewee)
Hogan, Mary Ann Backen.
(interviewee)
Noteboom, Kenneth W.
(interviewee)
Reid, Sharon Ransom.
(interviewee)
Wenstrom, Charles R.
(interviewee)

Finding aid prepared by Angela Barker and Chris Petersen.
2014

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