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“Even though we are a historical society, our focus is on the future rather than the past.”

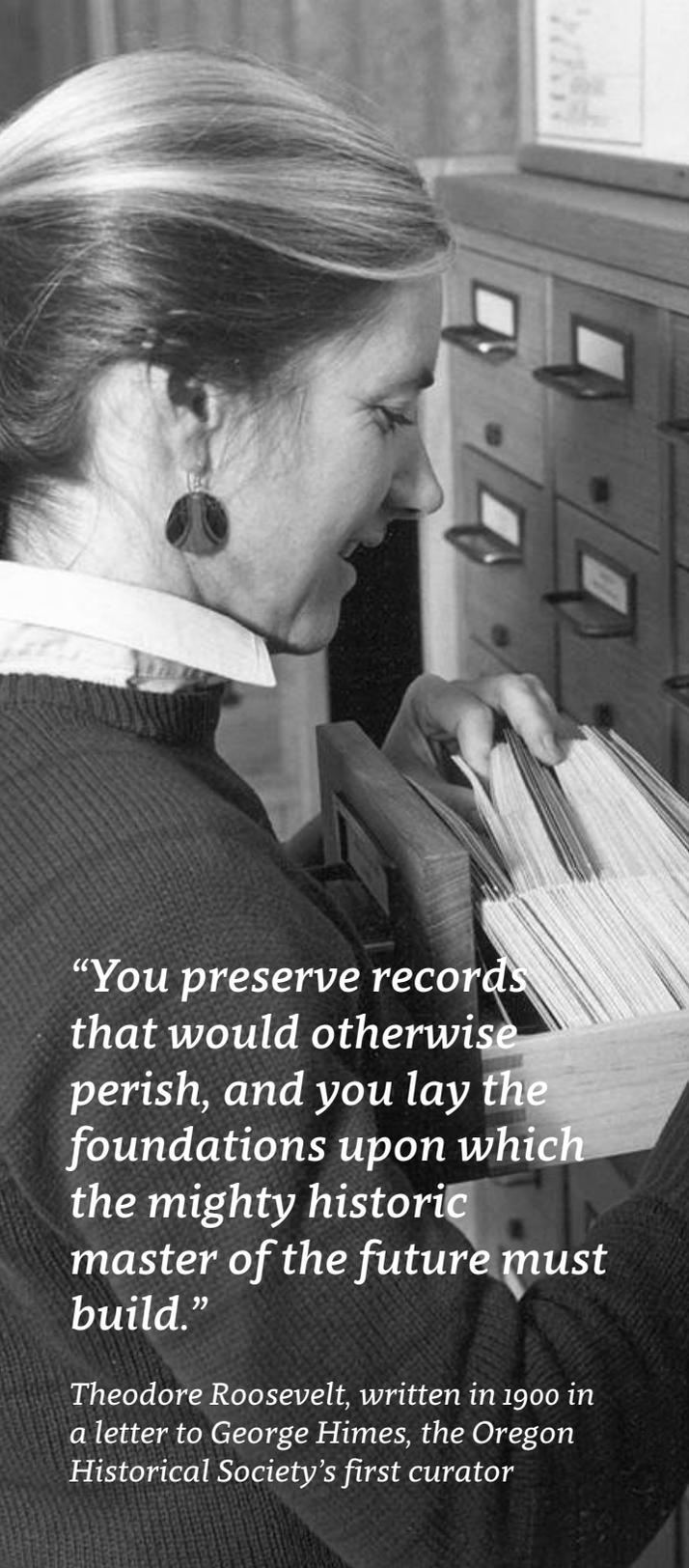
Kerry Tymchuk, OHS Executive Director

Introduction: Being OHS

Outstanding programmatic success. Diverse partnerships. Unprecedented financial growth. Generous donors and volunteers. Record attendance and expanded digital access. New and continuing members. Extraordinary leadership and a staff of talented professionals. An exceptional Board of Directors that has become increasingly representative of the many communities that comprise Oregon.

Our past five years have been marked by stellar accomplishments and nonstop work in service of all Oregonians. **What is required of OHS for the next five years?**

This is a time to redouble our efforts to partner with communities across the state as we also deepen our internal capabilities to become a more diverse and inclusive institution. It is a time to further leverage the power of technology to enhance the visitor and user experience, and to become a more efficient, effective, and collaborative organization. And it is a time for continued efforts to increase our visibility across Oregon, building on the positive momentum of recent years.



About the Oregon Historical Society

History is powerful: it shapes our understanding of who we are as individuals, as communities, and as a society. We draw on our understanding of history to contextualize the present and to create the future.

Founded in 1898, the Oregon Historical Society preserves our state's history and makes it accessible to everyone in ways that advance knowledge and inspire curiosity about all the people, places, and events that have shaped Oregon.

With a vast collection — including artifacts, photographs, maps, textiles, artworks, manuscript materials, books, films, and oral histories — OHS serves as the state's collective memory. Our research library, museum, digital platforms, educational programming, and historical journal make Oregon's history accessible to all. With strong support from both public and private sectors, we offer a broad array of programs that create meaningful opportunities for scholarship, creative projects, learning, teaching, and community building — all centered around the state's long, complex history.

“You preserve records that would otherwise perish, and you lay the foundations upon which the mighty historic master of the future must build.”

Theodore Roosevelt, written in 1900 in a letter to George Himes, the Oregon Historical Society's first curator

What We Do

We share our vast collection through thought-provoking exhibits, digital collections, and digital history projects. Our scholarship, public lectures, and community events support lifelong learning—often challenging conventional thinking about power, commerce, class, democracy, art, and science.

We advance critical inquiry through the *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, a journal that has sparked conversations and knowledge creation for more than a century. Our research library is a destination for international scholars, as well as Oregonians who are curious about their own ancestry or community history.

With tours and traveling trunks, we bring history directly to Oregon students, bridging gaps of time and perspective. Through our *History Hub*, Family Days, and events such as the Lunar New Year Parade, we continually work to create a welcoming, engaging, and fun environment for people of all ages and backgrounds.

(Left to Right) Children explore *History Hub*; OHS volunteer views photos in the Research Library; crowd welcomes dragon at 2016 Lunar New Year Parade



Accomplishments & Challenges

Since 2011, when OHS began receiving funding from a levy approved by Multnomah County voters, we have increased membership, corporate and foundation support, and individual giving, while actively cultivating partnerships to engage diverse new audiences.

The *FORWARD!* capital campaign, launched in 2016, has inspired unprecedented financial gifts that are enabling us to create a new, permanent Oregon history exhibit, *Experience Oregon*; to renovate the world-class Research Library; and to expand the innovative Digital Vault, which brings OHS collections to researchers across the globe.

“In knowledge and history lay our greatest weapons, our greatest true power.”

Senator Mark O. Hatfield



Working with new community partners, we have prioritized bringing increased attention to the history of peoples that OHS, like many historical organizations, has long ignored. For example, we proudly hosted exhibits and programs focused on the histories of Oregon's Chinese and African American communities and deeply engaged with Oregon's nine federally recognized Tribes to develop *Experience Oregon*. We now regularly work with diverse community partners whose advice guides many aspects of our work. This engagement has brought new audiences, researchers, members, and donors to OHS.

Along with making significant progress, OHS has experienced challenges. The cost of doing business and managing growth has continued to rise. Much of the staff is over-extended as the institution has taken on new projects without hiring additional employees. While OHS has increased the diversity of our Board of Trustees, additional work is needed to deepen internal diversity and inclusion across the institution. Finally, our technology systems and strategy have not kept pace as demands for technology — and associated opportunities — have increased significantly.

Seining salmon, Columbia River, OHS Research Library, bb015463





Planning for the Next Five Years

Led by a Design Team with consultant support, the planning process engaged numerous stakeholders including trustees, staff, volunteers, educators, editorial advisory board members, the Cabinet (OHS's emerging leaders board), affiliates from around the state, members, community leaders, and national experts in public history, research libraries, archives, and museums.

Informed by these diverse perspectives, the OHS Board of Trustees, Senior Team, and a cross-section of staff and Cabinet members came together for a series of interactive sessions to explore OHS's vision, values, strengths, challenges, and strategies. The Design Team then fleshed out a five-year strategic framework and associated near-term implementation milestones. After integrating input from the staff, trustees, and Cabinet, the final plan was approved by the Board.

Hand-colored photograph of Crater Lake and Wizard Island in summer, OHS Research Library, Kiser Co. Photograph Collection, ba020843

“History gives context and informs us of why we are here now. False history does not provide proper context. We have mostly been given false history. This is turning around a bit now.... I am happy to see that OHS is continuing to evolve with a deep commitment to being community-oriented.”

Gwen Carr, Oregon Black Pioneers

Our Mission

The Oregon Historical Society preserves our state's history and makes it accessible to everyone in ways that advance knowledge and inspire curiosity about all the people, places, and events that have shaped Oregon.

Members of Air Corps, (left to right) Millard Chung, Constance Moy, Di Lam, OHS Research Library, bb009687



“Oregon’s history started with exclusion. Not everyone was or is allowed to be at the table. People are yearning for a place to try to understand how we got here. How will we make the new immigrant populations understand Oregon’s history in a way that they will feel and identify as being part of this history? OHS is already beginning to do this.”

Judith Margles, Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education and American Alliance of Museums

Our Values

OHS aspires to consistently enact the following values:

INTEGRITY

OHS is committed to honest communication, transparency, and managing resources in a trustworthy and accountable manner. We foster evidence-based practices in our research, scholarship, exhibits, education programs, and publications.

INVITATION

OHS is a community gathering space, resource, and catalyst for civic engagement that is rooted in understanding Oregon’s history. We foster meaningful relationships with many individuals and partners who inform and direct our work.

EQUITY AND INCLUSION

OHS seeks to address historical exclusion by embracing an inclusive understanding of the Oregon experience. In partnership with multiple communities, we educate the public about inequities as we work to change our own institution.

CULTURAL HUMILITY

OHS believes that history cannot be contained within a single story or point of view. We respect the validity of different perspectives and are committed to exploring and embracing multiple ways of knowing.

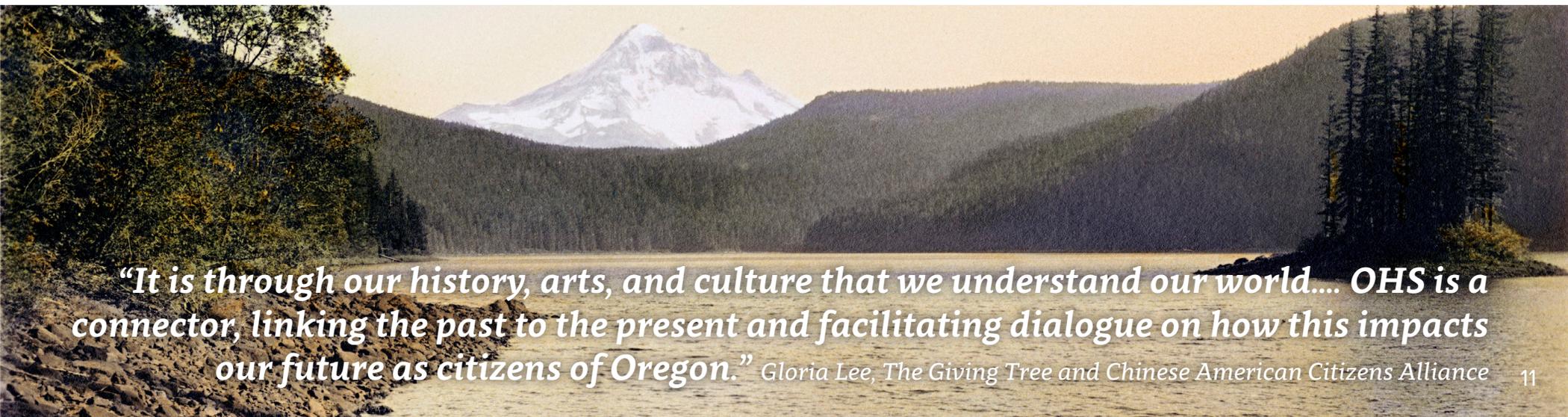
ACCESSIBILITY

OHS strives to provide access to everyone along the continuum of human ability and experience. With a variety of learning methods, technologies, and languages, we enable all people to experience the power of history.

LEARNING

OHS values questions, new ideas, and unexpected connections and discoveries that arise through inquiry. We welcome challenging conversations and the opportunity to learn from mistakes. We recognize that willingness to change our minds is crucial to understanding history and applying it to the present.

Bull Run & Mt. Hood, 1908, OHS Research Library, Kiser Co. Photograph Collection, bb004387



“It is through our history, arts, and culture that we understand our world... OHS is a connector, linking the past to the present and facilitating dialogue on how this impacts our future as citizens of Oregon.” Gloria Lee, *The Giving Tree* and Chinese American Citizens Alliance



Strategic Environment

Several influential trends and developments are shaping the OHS operating environment: ubiquitous technology is re-shaping how we live, learn, work, and how we participate in civic and cultural life. Technological change is a constant. Racial and ethnic diversity is growing, and with it comes productive pressure to create more equitable and welcoming institutions. New education requirements in Oregon have elevated the teaching of ethnic studies and tribal histories.

The funding landscape is challenging due to changes in federal tax law, state and local budget pressures, and competition for philanthropic resources. Generational shifts are underway, creating changes in how people approach volunteering and charitable giving.

In the fields of public history and museums, a significant trend is that institutions are becoming more community-centered and are co-creating with partners — particularly with communities that have historically been excluded or marginalized. Historical institutions are increasingly bringing historical context to current issues. With the use of digital technology, they are enhancing the visitor experience and broadening accessibility beyond museum walls. Other noteworthy trends include greater use of primary sources in teaching history and an increasing emphasis on teaching research and critical analysis skills, which are foundational for a democratic society.

Our Vision

We foster a better tomorrow through an Oregon story that is meaningful to all Oregonians.

We strive to be:

- A diverse and inclusive statewide institution that reflects the histories of all Oregonians
- A relevant and welcoming history institution that links the present with the past
- A valuable resource for anyone curious about Oregon's history
- A well-known brand and destination

“History — knowing who you are and where you’re from — is medicine. Your relationships and community benefit when you can place things in context and have a way to organize the world around you. With any group of people, no matter what the social ill is, it comes from a lack of understanding, a lack of context.... If you can stimulate dialogue, conversation, and understanding, it makes the world a better place.”

David Harrelson, The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

Strategic Direction & Goals

To move towards our vision while addressing key challenges, OHS will pursue four broad strategic directions and associated goals over the next five years:

ENHANCE BELONGING

- Continue to collaborate with communities and affiliates statewide to bring increased diversity to the history we gather and present
- Develop and implement institution-wide Diversity-Equity-Accessibility-Inclusion (DEAI) program
- Get to know our visitors and enhance the visitor experience

GROW OUR REACH AND RESOURCES

- Build on the momentum of the *FORWARD!* initiatives
- Maintain and grow our funding, including private and public support
- Become a visible and valued resource for all of Oregon

Four men stand at mouth of Hood River, OHS Research Library, bb006728





PROACTIVELY EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY

- Develop and execute an institution-wide technology planning to: increase reach/diversity, amplify impact, and improve efficiency
- Support operations, programs, exhibitions, education, and collections
- Maintain and update technology systems

OPERATE WITH EXCELLENCE AND CREATIVITY

- Foster a culture of collaboration, learning, and evaluation
- Continue our commitment to programmatic excellence and innovation
- Update our organizational structure and practices to align with strategic priorities
- Optimize our physical space

“We can’t even imagine how we will learn history in 20 years... If someone had told me 20 years ago that a Puerto Rican writer would create an opera about a long past U.S. president, that he would use hip-hop to convey the drama and make the Revolutionary War into an American immigrant story, that it would go viral, and that my young nieces would memorize the entire libretto, I would not have believed it!” Jacob Nadal, Library of Congress

Planning Cycle

OHS’s planning cycle will promote continual action, reflection, and accountability as we implement the strategic plan. To ensure a “living plan” and alignment across our institution, we anticipate regular review sessions and an annual retreat to celebrate accomplishments, monitor progress, and make plan updates.

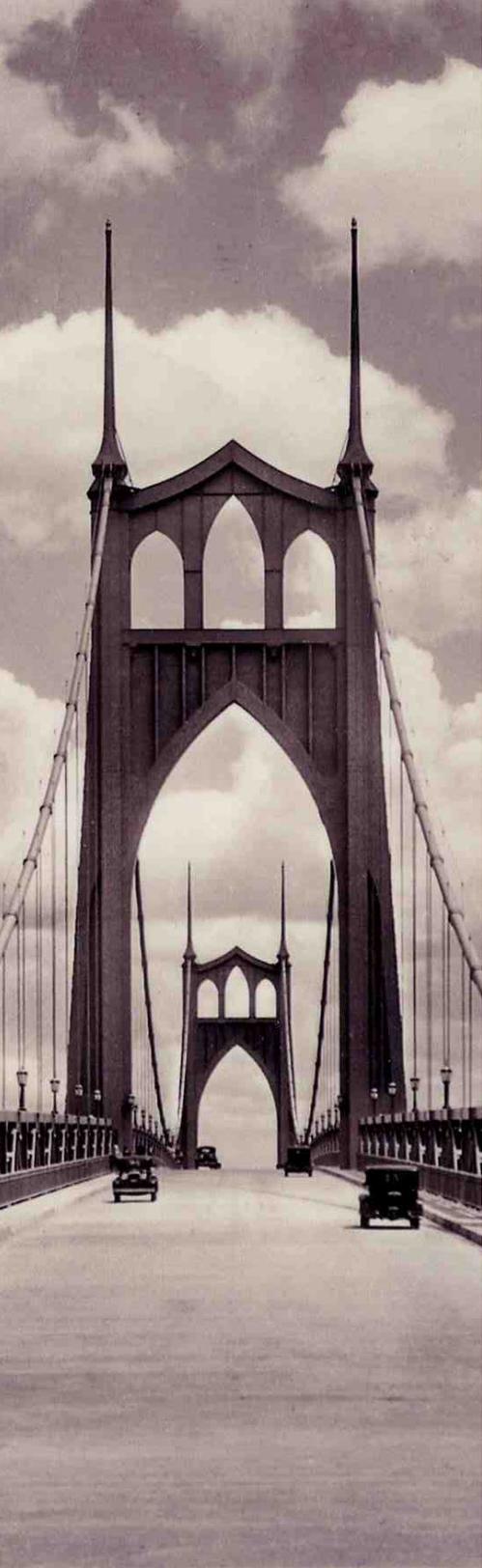


Implementation Plan *January 2019 – June 2020*

Strategic Direction and Goals (5-Year Horizon)		Actionable Milestones (Within 18-Months)
<p>Enhance Belonging</p> 	Continue to collaborate with communities statewide to bring increased diversity to the history we gather and present	Current partnerships and audiences mapped as a “baseline” to inform outreach priorities; field services considered
	Develop and implement institution-wide Diversity-Equity-Accessibility-Inclusion (DEAI) program	Affiliate communication vehicles strengthened
	Get to know our visitors and enhance the visitor experience	Board-Staff-Cabinet DEAI Work Group launched; institution-wide engagement strategy and metrics developed; training underway
<p>Grow Our Reach and Resources</p> 	Build on the momentum of the <i>FORWARD!</i> initiatives: <i>Experience Oregon</i> , Digital Vault, Renovated Library	First annual Visitors Count! survey implemented in cooperation with AASLH
	Maintain and grow our funding, including private and public support	Statewide awareness campaign developed for <i>Experience Oregon</i> , Digital Vault and Renovated Library
	Become a visible and valued resource for all of Oregon	Strategy developed to retain <i>FORWARD!</i> supporters; new member campaign
		OHS financial reserve analysis, through the lens of economic resiliency
	Groundwork for Multnomah County Levy renewal established	
	Brand orientation to familiarize staff and board with OHS brand guidelines	

Implementation Plan *January 2019 – June 2020*

Strategic Direction and Goals (5-Year Horizon)		Actionable Milestones (Within 18-Months)
Proactively Embrace Technology 	Develop and execute an institution-wide technology planning to increase reach/diversity, amplify impact, improve efficiency	Three-Year Digital/IT Roadmap developed
	Support operations, programs, exhibitions, education, and collections	Enhanced capacity to digitize and create access to maps and plans, oral histories, and film
	Maintain and update technology systems	Network assessment to inform technology updates and upgrades Short-term staff training priorities identified; implementation underway
Operate with Excellence and Creativity 	Foster a culture of collaboration, learning, and evaluation	Strategic plan review sessions to track progress (based on the strategic framework); begin 12/19 or 1/20 Evaluation plan developed with institution-wide success measures Internal decision-making protocols reviewed and updated
	Continue our commitment to programmatic excellence and innovation	Programmatic innovations highlighted annually with trustees and key stakeholders
	Update organizational structure and practices to align with strategic priorities	Staffing plan reviewed based on strategic priorities; workloads assessed; some projects eliminated to enable staff capacity for strategic priorities Board self-assessment and committee structure update to align with strategic priorities
	Optimize our physical space	Renovated library integrates digital and analog resources in a more accessible and flexible space Building space utilization and infrastructure needs identified



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Field Experts and Community Leaders Interviewed

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FOUNDED 1898