

Evaluation of the Kinsley Library Oral History Project
Tractorcade to D.C.:
Edwards County Farmers and the American Agricultural Movement - 1979

1. Did the project meet your goals and expectations? What were your biggest successes?
The project met all of our goals.

Goal A - Preservation and Interpretation

1. We learned that Edwards County played a very active and leadership role in this national movement.

2. We recorded 14 Tractorcade and AAM participants' oral histories of the events surrounding the 1979 tractorcade to Washington , D.C. This was four more than we had planned to conduct in the grant application.

3. We discovered that most participants did not believe that the Tractorcade had any influence on legislation, but it did make the public aware of the farmer's plight. Most also said that they would do it again even knowing it had little impact.

Goal B – Use of best standards and practices

4. We digitally recorded the oral histories and preserved and backed up the WAV file on Kinsley Library storage and backup servers. We also created an archival CD for each interview. Professional transcriptions were made and proofread by the director of the project and finally by the interviewee. Metadata was created for the interviews and incorporated into the Kinsley Library collection catalog following established standards. Hundreds of images from the interviewee's private collections were scanned to illustrate the oral histories. Although it is not a best practice, most were electronically enhanced to correct the very poor faded color quality. In this way, we feel we saved the pictures from loss.

Goal C – Increase public access to local cultural resources

5. The interviews have been archived at the Kinsley Library, the Edwards County Historical Society and the Kansas State Historical Society.

6. Metadata was created for each interview, and it was entered into the Kinsley Library on-line catalog. The interview short videos were entered with keywords on YouTube resulting in easy access in web searches.

7. Before, during, and after the oral histories the public was kept informed through the local newspaper. The four weeks before the final open house, one participant's Tractorcade diary was run, week by week, in the local paper. An open house was conducted for the public which drew 125 people from all over central and western Kansas. A nine panel display was exhibited in the library for 2 months.

8. The transcript, images, and an audio CD was given to each participant. Additional copies can be printed from the library website if desired.

Goal D – Strengthen relationships between organizations

9 – Dr. Virgil W. Dean helped us insure quality results by advising us on the questions and progress of the project.

2. How many of the activities in your work plan were you able to complete during the grant period? If additional work remains, how do you plan to complete the project?

We completed all aspects of the project by February 5, 2013.

3. Were you satisfied with the role of the humanities consultant in the project? What kinds of specific ideas, training, and /or guidance did s/he offer?

I was very satisfied. Dr. Dean offered valuable advice when I developed the questions. I regularly notified him for his review as we added audio interviews and transcripts on the library website. He gave me positive feedback and encouragement. It is difficult in our remote area to have personal contact with a scholar, and I have very much appreciated being able to work with a remote scholar electronically. It facilitated the project and made the process easier.

4. What format (newspaper publicity, publications, displays, etc. did you use to share the project with the community? Were any public meetings held, and if so, how many people attended?

We had extensive publicity in a wide variety of media. It included articles in the Edwards County *Sentinel* and many area newspapers including feature articles in the *Wichita Eagle*, *Hutchinson News*, and *Dodge City Globe*. The project had a full-length article in the Winter issue of the *Legend* magazine. A nine panel display was exhibited in the library. The project was covered on the Channel 12 KAKE TV News. The February 5 open house was attended by 125 people from all over central and western Kansas. The interviews, images, and videos on the library website have been enjoyed by both the local and remote community.

5. Which statewide repository has been notified of your project?

Kansas State Historical Society

6. Describe any kinds of follow-up activities that you anticipate (exhibits, public programs, additional research, etc.) in your community.

I have shared the project with the local Rotary Club, the Kansas Museums Association and Southwest Kansas Library System, the Kansas Association of Historians, and the Central Kansas Library System. I will be sharing it at the national Small and Rural Library Conference in Omaha in September, perhaps the Kansas Library Conference in October.

Three entities have asked to exhibit my display next year.

An independent film company from Lubbock has expressed a desire to use our research and resources and have our cooperation on a documentary about the Tractorcade.

I scanned and archived in the Kinsley Library collection many historical documents and newspaper articles from the A.A.M., the Tractorcade trip and Washington, D.C. We are to become the repository of some files and papers of one of the participants.

7. Please provide a summary of your project's findings. Tell us what you learned from your research or oral histories.

Farmers from Edwards County were very active in the American Agriculture Movement. They were not as militant as some, but they worked hard to promote the plight of the family farm. A few became involved with contact with the movement organizers in Eastern Colorado and around Liberal, Kansas. They brought the movement to Kansas. A Lewis "Strike Office" was established, and it had regular hours manned by volunteers. The movement began as a call for farmers to strike, or not to produce crops and livestock, in 1977. A few farmers did burn crops in the field or did not plant.

These farmers were very worried about losing their farms. They were not getting enough money to cover the cost of production, let alone make a living. They wanted "Parity" which, simply stated, is enough money to cover the cost of production with a living profit. Their farms were going deeper in debt, and they could not see how their children, who were at the age to begin farming, could afford to continue. It seemed to them that they were being driven off land that, in many cases, had been in the family for generations.

Edwards County citizens and local farmers ranged in their support. There was some animosity towards the protesting farmers as they attempted to organize, and confrontation did happen at strike meetings outside of Edwards County. It seems that the local movement was strong enough and supported by respected farmers, that the negative was able to be kept down and ignored, but it was there. Some people thought they were just bellyaching. Some thought they were wasting their time and what little money they had to fight a futile cause. Some farmers only assisted financially while others participated locally in smaller tractorcades in surrounding Kansas communities in 1977 and 1978 and/ or in Topeka (December of 1977 and 1978). Not everyone had the resources (time, money, equipment) to go to Washington, D.C. Farmers with livestock which took daily care could not leave for an extended time like the crop farmers could who naturally had nonproductive time during the winter. The Lewis area was most solidly behind the movement, and members from Kinsley and Offerle ended up joining with those from Lewis when they could not sustain strike offices in their own communities. There were incidents of both disapproval and approval by the parents of participants.

Participants who went to D.C. ranged in age from 25 to 74, although most were from 40 to 52 with children in college or young adults.

Washington, D.C. Tractorcaders - age in 1979 - (vehicles on trip) - CITY OF RESIDENCE

William A. Stapleton – age 74, deceased and not interviewed (Pickup & 5th wheel) BELPRE

Clara Stapleton – age 69, deceased and not interviewed

Jack Wolfe – age 63 (Pickup & trailer, had accident and had to turn back, flew to DC) LEWIS

Dosca Wolfe – age 58, deceased and not interviewed

Jim Titus – age 59, deceased and not interviewed (Pickup and trailer) LEWIS

Jean Titus – age 57

Ed Scheuffler – age 52 (Pickup and camper, Drove Titus tractor) BELPRE

Marjory Scheuffler – age 48

Darrel Miller – age 43 (Advance car with trailer) LEWS

Karen Miller – age 41

Lester Derley – age 36 (Drove fuel/service truck) LEWIS

Beverly Snyder (Anderson) – age 33 - (Drove tractor)

Larry Seele – age 25, deceased and not interviewed (Drove Stapleton tractor) PAXICO

Active A.A.M. members interviewed not on D.C. Tractorcade but very active – age in 1979

Jeff Mead – age 47 LEWIS

Dolores Jones – age 42 OFFERLE

Peggy Arensman – age 42 KINSLEY

Alvin Wheaton – age 42 LEWIS

Mary Ellen Schinstock – age 34 KINSLEY

Jerry Stapleton – 34 BELPRE

Husbands and wives were real partners in this cause. The interviewees believed that the struggle had strengthened their marriages, but they also noted that for many others, the strain of losing the farm destroyed the marriage through divorce, alcoholism, depression, and suicide. Three of the younger interviewees (in their thirties at the time) would lose their farms in the early 1980's. Another would have except for having a good lawyer to fight the banks. None of the interviewees had anything good to say about any of the banks in the communities who seemed to encourage debt with a readiness to foreclose.

Members traveled extensively in this area talking to farmers and organizing groups in other communities. They demonstrated in local small towns, Oklahoma City, Wichita, and Topeka, before the decision was made to take the cause to Washington, D.C. Some made several flights to D.C. to lobby on farm bills in the years before and after 1979. Darrel Miller, a farmer with a degree in broadcasting, was an active organizer early on. He was designated to talk to the media as the Tractorcade moved across the country, and spoke on the Larry King radio program while in D.C. Peggy Arensman became a farm lobbyist representing the A.A.M. and W.I.F.E (Women in Farm Economics). We interviewed Jerry Stapleton whose father William A. Stapleton (deceased) remained very active in A.A.M. for many years. None of this group spent time in jail in D.C. Beverly Snyder (Anderson) was responsible for blocking traffic, but she obeyed the officer when told to get over and allowing time for another tractor to take her place. Alvin Wheaton did hit someone but was not arrested as he got away into the crowd. A year later, he was one of the men who "stole" Wayne Cryts soybeans back out of a foreclosed elevator in Missouri in 1980 and had the FBI talking to him.

Beverly Snyder (Anderson) drove her tractor every mile to D.C. without her husband who stayed home to take care of their 3 year old and the farm animals. We think she is the only woman to drive from such a distance. She kept a diary which this project scanned and transcribed for the archives. Although the entries are brief, it gives insight into what the trip was like and reveals facts, humor and feelings. Beverly also had a scrapbook of the newspaper coverage of the trip across county and in D.C. These articles were scanned and archived in the library collection.

William and Clara Stapleton, although elderly, were determined to go to D.C. Their son Jerry had a new enough tractor to make the trip, but neither Jerry nor his brother Bill could get away from farming and teaching respectively to make the trip. William announced at a state meeting shortly before the trip that he had a tractor that could go but no driver. A couple from Paxico, KS at the meeting said they had a son, a diesel mechanic, who wanted to go, but had no tractor. They called their son who was on a motor cycle trip in California, and he drove home, got off his cycle and into the cab of the Stapleton tractor and was off to D.C. One of the special aspects of this project is that this young man's name had been lost. Through persistent research, following clues, and sheer luck, his family was finally located, and his name, Larry Seele, discovered and the details outlined above revealed. Unfortunately he was deceased, but his sister provided pictures of him and then made the trip to Kinsley for the open house to meet the people who had traveled with her brother. It was an honor and joy to restore Larry to Kansas history.

Peggy Arensman was a high school graduate farm wife with children. She was the activist in her family as her husband ran cattle and farmed. She became a lobbyist for the farm cause, mainly through W.I.F.E. and had interviews with President Reagan and Vice President George H. W. Bush. She would fly to Washington for a week, then fly home for a week, and go back and forth like that. She would testify at various hearings in D.C. and elsewhere. She did this for several years, until bad health forced her to stop.

The activities of the local A.A.M., including the various tractorcades, were financed by the individual themselves, donations from supporters, fund raising with an auction and the selling of buttons. The latter were traded or sold to other A.A.M. members and other union member sympathizers and individuals that they met as they traveled across the country and in D.C. These funds could be used for gasoline and food. The buttons display humor, sometimes quite blunt or raw. They have been saved by the participants and were on display in the library. They were also scanned and the images are archived in the library. Participants also saved unused bumper stickers and these were on display in the library with scanned images archived.

The route of the trip and the various camping places can be found in the Timeline that follows this evaluation. When they started out, they had no idea how to go about moving this parade which grew bigger every day across the country. Each night the tractor drivers would meet to make a plan for the next day that might work better than the one they had had that day. Darrel Miller drove ahead to try to find a place big enough for all the tractors and support vehicles to camp in. He also tried to explain to state and local police just how big a contingency was coming. The Governor of Missouri forced them off the right lane of Interstate 70 where they did not block traffic onto Hwy 50, a two-lane road where they held up traffic and sometimes had accidents because people and police did not understand that tractors cannot (and would not) stop.

The trip itself was very difficult, as they "did not see the sun" the whole way. There were two major snowstorms on the journey and a third one the day after they rode into the Capitol. Days were long, hard, and cold. They would drive from morning to late afternoon. In the evening Lester Derley would gas the tractors for Central Kansas while in camp. They also had rallies and meeting with local farmers at night. They slept in camper-trailers which were not well-insulated and often had trouble with frozen water pipes and waste pipes. They camped at Cherry Hill Camp City in Maryland and traveled back and forth to the Capitol to demonstrate and lobby

On February 5, the three separate Tractorcades coming from the different areas of the U.S. drove thousands of tractors into Washington D.C., causing congestion and blocking traffic. Farmers thought that the police were not honoring their parade permit and the police thought the farmers were not following the agreements made. The Edwards County participants all remarked on the feelings they had seeing police in full riot gear and with guns standing ready. Lester Derley, a recent veteran, had seen the guns first as they drove into Missouri, and it was evident that even today, he could not understand how the country he had just served, could have weapons ready to use against him. "We just wanted to tell our story," was reiterated many times by the interviewees. Some understood that the Police had to be ready for trouble, and that there were more militant demonstrators than those from Edwards County. Old tractors and farm equipment were burned on the Mall, goats and donkeys were deposited on the Capitol steps and White House Lawn, and clashes occurred with the police.

To prevent future traffic tie-ups the police brought every city vehicle from garbage trucks to busses, and blockaded the farmers onto the Mall. On the second day, the big snowstorm hit, and the farmers used their tractors to move snow and transport medical personnel to hospitals. The farmers became heroes and gained respect. Darrel Miller suggested that the farmers use a big tow rope to move one of the city busses enough to allow six or seven tractors to "escape." This surprised the police, but they were rounded up and taken back to the Mall. Later a compromise was reached, and the police would allow some tractors out each day to demonstrate.

The Millers got to know Robert Klotz, who was in charge of special operations for the D.C. Police. During an interview in November, 2011 found on the Internet, Klotz was asked if "Occupy D.C." reminded him of any other protest camps during his 25 year tenure. He cited the 1979 Tractorcade.

Peggy Aresnman, Jack Wolfe, Alvin Wheaton, and the Leo Schinstock family flew in for the Tractorcade. They stayed in hotels. The Edwards County participants stayed anywhere from a week, to several weeks, to three months in the case of the Millers. The group which had driven to D.C. camped in Cherry Hill Camp City in Maryland, except for the Miller who moved onto the Mall. Camp life on the Mall was not easy as it was not equipped with water and sewer hook ups. Water was carried in and manholes lifted to dump.

The participants spent their time lobbying in the offices of legislators and going to hearings, and volunteering in the A.A.M. office. Nearly all of the interviewees said that the Tractorcade did not produce any legislation to aid the farmer. The politicians would listen and then not do anything to remedy the problems or bring about parity. There were mixed reviews on Senator Bob Dole, but he did support the farmers as did Representative Keith Sebelius. Senator Nancy Kasselbaum listened but was not for parity. Newly elected Kansas Representative Dan Glickman admitted to not knowing anything about farming which is ironic as years later he would be appointed Secretary of Agriculture. There was a great deal of animosity towards President Jimmy Carter and his Secretary of Agriculture Robert Bergland whose trade policies hurt the farmer. Everyone received an education in politics and how things work (or don't) in Washington.

Beverly Snyder and Lester Derley flew home within a week to young families. The Derley fuel truck was driven back by the Leo Schinstocks. The tractors that drove to D.C. were trailered back by the Ford Implement dealer in Greensburg. Participants all thought the movement did raise the public's awareness to the plight of the farmer. They did not regret being part of the movement and are proud of this chapter in their lives. This became evident during the course of the interviews in the amount of memorabilia, papers, and pictures they all had kept. All still had the tractors that were used in the various Tractorcades, and the signs that had been draped on them, still hang in their storage buildings. All said they would not trade the experience for anything. Some said they would not do it again, while others were ready to do it again tomorrow. Some thought they really learned how the government worked (or didn't work) and they used the experience to take their children to Washington D.C. to learn about the government. They, and the other Tractorcade participants from around the state who came to the open house, showed gratitude that this episode in farm history had not been forgotten. The open house filled the library with stories and a warm sense of community that made the day very special.

The library collection has grown not only by 14 oral histories, but also with hundreds of images, newspaper articles, and documents.