

A project recently completed by the Oregon State Archives Division has unlocked audio recordings of landmark legislation important to Oregon's heritage; namely, the 1967 Beach Bill. As professionals, Archivists are frequently faced with the dilemma of how to preserve and make accessible information created or recorded in defunct technology. This has been a problem faced by the State Archives for almost two decades. Legislative audio recordings from the 1967 and 1969 sessions, used a proprietary format called ROLs Dictation Tape. By the early 1990's, the Archives' playback equipment for this audio format was no longer functioning and replacement equipment could not be found. In 2007, a researcher working on a documentary history of the Beach Bill contacted the Archives. Although we were able to provide access to the written records from the Legislature for this important legislation we had to explain that the audio was unavailable due to technological obsolescence (the lack of equipment available for playing back the recordings). The researcher was able to track down playback equipment owned by the inventor's son who lived in Europe. He brokered a loan of the equipment to an audio restoration company in New York City, making it possible for the Archives to get one audio recording duplicated and digitized. An estimate for digitizing all the Beach Bill audio recordings by this company in 2008 was \$75,000.

During the intervening years, the researcher was able to secure a machine and donated it to the Archives but unfortunately it was in bad repair and would not play, nor could the Archives locate somebody willing to work on the machine. In 2013, a functioning machine was listed for sale online and the Archives was able to purchase it for \$3000.



The above photo is the ROLs audio player that we purchased with one of the ROLs dictation tapes loaded onto it. The device was designed without a take-up reel so the audio tape just spools off onto the floor as it plays. With the acquisition of the player we were now able to listen to the recordings, but because of the rarity of the equipment and difficulty in securing parts or repair

services along with the fragile condition of the recordings we were reluctant to have patrons access the original tapes and equipment. In addition, the proprietary nature of the equipment prevented staff from readily transferring the audio to a more accessible format. We needed to find a solution so that all could benefit from being able to listen to these hearings.

Austin Schulz of the Archives staff enjoys tinkering with electronics and was confident that he could create some sort of adapter that would allow the Archives to digitally record the audio directly from the ROLs playback machine. After a bit of trial and error trying to figure out how the headphones functioned, he came up with a workable solution. By removing the wire which he found plugged into the mono headphone speaker, he was able to attach wire leads to the two exposed posts and then attach the other ends of the wire into a contemporary headphone jack. This configuration allowed staff to plug in an audio cable from the new headphone jack to the audio input on a computer and digitally record the audio. Once the process was complete and shown to work, we announced that this previously unavailable audio was going to become available in the near future to the delight of some of our patrons.

[Mary Jean Winter](#) Way to go, Austin! Your ingenuity and perseverance is directly rescuing parts of My History so my descendants can access it.... Many libraries/historical societies have old equipment/data storage they just don't know what to do with, and it just sits & decays (and all its history with it). A heartfelt "Thanks" to you for saving this bit of our heritage!

[Like](#) · [Reply](#) · [1](#) · [April 4, 2013](#)



The above photo shows from left to right : headphones without the cable attached; ROLs audio player; audio wire and its packaging; computer; and in front of that is the foot pedal used to both

play the ROLs audio and rewind it depending on the amount of pressure applied to the pedal. The thicker dark cable coming off of the ROLs audio player goes to the foot pedal and the smaller one usually attaches to the headphones (far left) but was removed to allow staff to attach wire leads to the new headphone adapter. Finally, an audio line hooks into the new headphone adapter and plugs into the front of the computer (black cable).

Duplication of the ROLs tape can only be done on a 1:1 basis - one hour of audio took one hour to record. Due to the time it took to adjust the recording software settings, make the digital recordings and perform some basic cleanup of the quality, Archives staff was able to complete between 1 and 2 recordings per day. The last steps involved identifying each digital recording with appropriate metadata and importing each recording in the Oregon Records Management Solution (ORMS), which will not only ensure the audio will be accessible far into the future but also allows patrons to access the audio from their home computers.

There were a total of 12 ROLs dictation tapes with legislative discussions relating to 1967 HB 1601 (Oregon Beach Bill) and one reel to reel audio tape which amounted to over 20 1/2 hours of legislative committee audio that had been previously unavailable to researchers. These new digital recordings are now available from the Archives website at:

http://sos.oregon.gov/archives/Pages/records/legislative_tracings.aspx where the patron can type in "Beach Bill" or "HB 1601" and the results are displayed on the screen. Once the result link is clicked on, the audio begins playing. Below is a list of the audio results for the Beach Bill.

1967 House Highway Committee Audio

Meeting on April 6, 1967 Tape 29 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/kk7yw6z>
Meeting on April 13, 1967 Tape 31 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/ltpjgk6>
Meeting on April 18, 1967 Tape 32 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/lhp8cps>
Meeting on April 27, 1967 Tape 33 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/lyg3lbv>
Meeting on March 7, 1967 Tape 19 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/mleom7q>
Meeting on March 23, 1967 Tape 26 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/l8mpldq>
Meeting on May 2, 1967 Tape 34 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/luuwflj>
Meeting on May 11, 1967 Tape 38 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/man9srh>
Meeting on May 12, 1967 Tape 39 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/n54yeg9>
Meeting on May 16, 1967 Tape 40 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/mtaduwX>
Meeting on May 18, 1967 Tape 36 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/kbodueo>

1967 Senate Judiciary Committee Audio

Meeting on May 26 1967 - Tape 11 Side 1 (1967 HB 1601) <http://tinyurl.com/lcy3hoq>

In addition to the audio records, the Archives has also included the 1913 Open Beaches Bill and the legislative records and administrative correspondence from Governor McCall's records. They are all available to anyone with an internet connection in ORMS. There are many other important pieces of legislation in the ROLs format (i.e. early version of the Bottle Bill) which the Archives plans to digitize and make available for all Oregonians and researchers everywhere.