

Intermountain Song Trails | Libraries

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USU Launches “Intermountain Song Trails,” Seeking Community Memories of Songs Across the Region

Special Collections & Archives

Questions? Contact Joe Kinzer, Community & Oral History Archivist | joe.kinzer@usu.edu



Intermountain Song Trails A short call for participants

Utah State University’s Special Collections and Archives is launching a new community-based oral history initiative titled Intermountain Song Trails, which invites residents across the Intermountain West to share memories of the songs they grew up with.

About The Project

The project explores how songs travel across generations, families, and migration routes, from lullabies passed down at home to work songs, ballads, railroad songs, cowboy songs, and church or scouting traditions. Led by Joe

Kinzer, Community and Oral History Archivist and Folklore Curator at USU, the project aims to document how people in the region remember and carry forward songs rooted in family life, community traditions, and historical movement.

“Songs are powerful memory anchors,” Kinzer says. “A simple verse or melody can bring back a whole world of family stories, cultural knowledge, or memories of place. We want to document those connections before they disappear.”

Mapping Memory Across Migration Routes

A unique part of Intermountain Song Trails is its focus on historical routes such as the Mormon Trail, Oregon Trail, and the Transcontinental Railroad. These routes brought together a wide range of communities, workers, and cultures, each carrying songs that shaped the region’s cultural and musical landscape.

Kinzer and collaborators will link oral histories with digital mapping tools, placing memories in geographic context through an upcoming ArcGIS StoryMap. “It’s a way of showing how songs move with people,” Kinzer explains. “Whether carried across a railroad line, a migration corridor, or a childhood home, these songs travel and live in memory.”

A Collaborative Effort

The project is being developed in collaboration with folklorist and song collector Derek Piotr, whose fieldwork archive documents ballads, hymns, children’s songs, tales, and other vocal traditions as they are remembered and sung today. Piotr’s archive includes more than 1,500 recordings from individuals who range from professional singers to everyday community members and “non-singers” recalling fragments or family songs. His focus on memory, vocal fragments, and the lived experience of ordinary people complements Kinzer’s oral history work, creating a fuller picture of how song persists across families and communities.

Who Is the Project Looking For?

USU is seeking participants who remember songs from childhood or family life, including:

- songs from family or older relatives, like lullabies or children’s songs
- ballads, work songs, or cowboy songs

- songs tied to migration routes (Mormon Trail, Oregon Trail, Transcontinental Railroad)
- church, scouting, or community singing traditions
- anything remembered as part of the “song trails” passed down through generations

Participants are welcome to sing, hum, or share song fragments if they’d like, but performing is not required. The project is interested in the memories, stories, and personal meanings connected to them.

How to Participate

Community members who would like to share their memories can contact Joe Kinzer, Community & Oral History Archivist, Fife Folklore Archives, Special Collections & Archives, Utah State University Libraries:

- **Email** | joe.kinzer@usu.edu
- **Phone** | (435) 797-2683

Interviews can be scheduled in person or remotely.

Funding Support

Funding for Intermountain Song Trails is provided by the Utah Humanities Council and the Utah Historical Society.

Why It Matters

According to Kinzer, the project highlights the shared cultural inheritance of the Intermountain West. “Songs are part of how people make sense of movement, work, hardship, faith, and family,” he says. “Every memory we gather adds another thread to the larger story of this region.”

The resulting oral histories will be preserved within the Fife Folklore Archives at USU, making them accessible for future generations of researchers, community members, and family descendants.