

# Knowledge of Past Important to Future

THE STUDY of history often has been avoided by students and downgraded by adults but people seem to have more interest in the past than they care to admit.

Photographers tend to look for leaning barns, rusted fences and broken windmills instead of modern structures. Artists like to paint elderly folks with wrinkled faces and gnarled trees that have withstood time and the weather.

The popularity of old stamps, old coins, genealogy and whatever may fall in the broad category of "antiques" offers further evidence of our interest in history.

A sign on May Avenue reads "New Antiques" and we remember a magazine ad that offered "Antiques Made to Order." Those interested in genealogy come pretty close to having family histories made to order by firms that advertise royal crests for nearly any family name.

Publishers find historical books sell. The University of Oklahoma Press catalog for spring and summer 1983, just received, consists almost entirely of historical publica-

tions.

Archaeologists are digging zealously for buried artifacts and divers look for treasures at the bottom of the sea. Scientists are aiming devices into distant space in search of history.

Our entire nation participated in a colossal, dramatic history lesson when we celebrated our Bicentennial in 1976.

Few participants of 1907 were available to relate personal experiences for our statehood celebration in 1907 but Oklahomans used just about every means of communication to study it. Big plans are being made for another lesson when we observe the centennial of the Great Land Rush into central Oklahoma in 1989.

Most people who are making history are too busy to record it and some who think they are making history are only making mistakes.

Organizations usually start small and the importance of keeping accurate records for historical purposes seldom occurs to leaders until most of those who could supply data are

gone.

This fact became a reality to me in recent years while doing research in histories of the Oklahoma Farm Bureau, organized in 1942, and Oklahoma Live Stock Commission Co., formed in 1931. Nearly all of the original leaders were deceased.

For example, we found only one out of 29 charter members of Farm Bureau in Blaine County. One had moved away, two were in nursing homes and 25 were dead. In some counties we found none.

Regardless of prejudices we might have against the study of history, our past is important to our future. Wise men have said we may see where we are going only by knowing where we have been. Missing data allow speculation and may encourage the rewriting of history for political gain or personal profit.

Right now we are moving so rapidly into the electronic age that events don't hold still long enough for us to get a reasonable perspective on what to keep in our historical computers.