

Spokane Historical--a Smartphone App Built on Archival Materials

How often have you visited a new city, or even a familiar one, and wondered about its history? Maybe you see a striking historic building, or a monument, or a park, and wondered how it came to be. Visitors to Spokane with such questions can simply reach for their smartphones, and open a free app with over 250 historic sites with text, images, and even podcasts and videos, all created from research in area archives.

[Spokane Historical](#) is a student-driven project from the Public History Program at Eastern Washington University. Program director Dr. Larry Cebula holds a joint position as a history professor at EWU and as Assistant Digital Archivist at the Washington State Archives. Cebula and his students began developing content for Spokane Historical in 2011, and the app and website went live in the summer of 2012.

“What I love about Spokane Historical as a teaching tool is that it combines traditional archival research with digital technology,” says Cebula. Students use the Eastern Region Branch Archives and the Digital Archives to begin their research, which they supplement with trips to local libraries and museums, digitized newspapers at the Washington State Library, and other databases. They learn to build on their research to tell new kinds of stories. This quarter, for example, students are working with the [Spokane Voices of the Pioneers Oral Histories](#) at the digital archives, editing down the audio files into podcasts and then setting the voices to images to make short historical documentaries.

Spokane Historical is both a smartphone app and a website, so students graduate with digital portfolio. “Students are discovering stories that nearly everyone in Spokane had forgotten,” says Cebula, pointing to the time when Houdini dove off the [Washington Street Bridge](#), and the [city-sponsored hippie camp for Expo '74](#).

“It is the archives that make this project possible,” according to Cebula. The tens of thousands of historic records and photographs maintained by the Washington State Archives ensure that EWU students will be discovering stories for years to come.



Nearly Completed Bridge in 1909, Courtesy of the Washington State Archives