



Serving those who are interested in methods and techniques of the oral history process as a means of preserving unique memory of people, places, events and ideas

The Michigan PBB Oral History Project

*By Brittany Bayless Fremion,
Central Michigan University*

The Michigan PBB Oral History Project

gathers and preserves the stories of individuals as related to one of the largest but least known episodes of chemical contamination in U.S. history.

In 1973 a chemical plant in St. Louis, Michigan, accidentally shipped crystallized polybrominated biphenyl (PBB), a fire retardant, in place of a livestock-feed additive (magnesium oxide) to a Battle Creek feed plant. There, workers mixed the toxic chemical with a dairy ration and simultaneously cross-contaminated other feed cycled through the plant’s steel mixer. The mill distributed the feed to co-ops and farms across the state. For nearly a year, farm animals ingested feed tainted with PBB. Farmers were mystified and shocked by the rapidly declining health of their livestock. So were veterinarians. When the mixup was finally confirmed in 1974, public officials were not equipped to address the challenges such an insidious chemical presented; there was no precedent for a disaster like this. Farms were quarantined, livestock destroyed, and lives and livelihoods transformed.

Documenting the lived experience as related to PBB is at the heart of this project. We have heard many powerful stories. Much has changed in the 40+ years since contamination. We are also getting a sense of how individuals identified and understand exposure--how it affected their livestock and farms, but also their families, especially over the long term.

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Take-Aways from OHA 2018 in Montreal (Which Was Awesome!)

*By Camron Michael Amin,
University of Michigan-Dearborn*

The Oral History Metadata Synchronizer

(OHMS: <http://www.oralhistoryonline.org>) is a web-based indexing software for digitized recordings. Current versions of this open-source, non-proprietary software permit transcripts to be synced to recordings and indexes, all of which are searchable. OHMS now permits bi-lingual syncing and indexing (if you have translated versions of transcripts) and syncing to geo-spatial data (if your interviewee mentions a place, a map of the place can come up on the OHMS viewer). There are also efforts to use Artificial Intelligence (AI) for transcription and indexing of interviews. The bottom line is that AI is not yet accurate enough to offset the costs of editing/correcting initial transcripts. But, in what was termed a “good use of bad data,” AI-generated indexes might be accurate enough to give transcribers a useful overview of an interview to guide their work.

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About the Michigan Oral History Association

Mission

The mission of the Michigan Oral History Association (MOHA) is to provide effective cooperation and communication among persons, programs, and institutions concerned with the techniques, uses, and promotion of oral history in Michigan. Based on the foundation of the Michigan Oral History Council organized in 1979, the name of the non-profit corporation was changed to Michigan Oral History Association in 1994.

Who We Are

MOHA serves people interested in methods and techniques of the oral history process as a means of preserving unique memory of people, places, events and ideas. MOHA promotes and educates about oral history, as a resource for capturing on electronic media, attitudes and emotions not otherwise preserved. The pool of presenters includes experienced oral history practitioners, archivists, database managers, video producers, authors, professional transcribers, journalists and teachers. Presenters participate in history-related conference sessions, conduct workshops, and serve as facilitators for state and regional forums.

Request a Workshop! Workshops are tailored to meet the specific needs of the audience. Common topics presented: the importance of oral histories, how to organize a project, how to conduct oral histories, technology, forms to use, best practices, and archiving your oral histories. For help planning a workshop, contact Geneva Kebler Wiskemann at workshops@MichiganOHA.org or (517) 321-1746.

How Can MOHA Help You?

Workshops, information, advice and resources are available to both beginning and experienced oral historians. Forums provide exchange with others who may have similar problems, obstacles, and opportunities. Established or in-progress oral history projects can benefit from MOHA's ability to promote and publicize initiatives and resources.

Become a Member!

As a member, you will receive:

- The MOHA Newsletter
- Mentoring and assistance with your oral history project
- Opportunities to participate in local and statewide conferences and workshops
- News of MOHA publications and other related resources
- Updates on oral history innovations and current projects in the state
- Opportunity to join a MOHA committee

Membership Dues:

Individual:	\$25
Institutional:	\$50
Patron:	\$50
Sponsor:	\$100
Student:	\$15

*Send to: MOHA,
5580 W. State Rd., Lansing MI 48906-9325.*

Upcoming in Winter 2019 MOHA issue:

- Museums: Leading by Listening; Strengthening Community Bonds Through Oral Histories
- Critical Lifelines: The Lives and Work of Personal Care Workers
- Black Voices in Copper Country
- Oral Histories for Social Change

From Oral History Association:

The Society of American Archivists wants oral historians to present papers at its next conference. Check out the information here: <https://www2.archivists.org/am2019/program/call-for-program-proposals>

History Day is coming: This year's theme is "Triumph and Tragedy in History." Find a local History Day near you and volunteer to be a judge: <https://www.nhd.org/>.

MSU Archives unveils its new website – *Voices of MSU*

The Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections recently wrapped up the initial phase of its ***Voices of MSU oral history project***. *Voices of MSU* is an initiative that affirms and supports an inclusive university environment by expanding MSU Archives' collecting focus to reflect the breadth and diversity of the MSU community.

With generous funding from the MSU Office for Inclusion and Intercultural Initiatives, the MSU Archives & Historical Collections is collecting and making available oral histories of minority students, faculty, and staff at Michigan State University.

For the first phase of the project, two MSU students, Liz Timbs and Mileena McDonald, conducted six oral history interviews with professors, alumni, and current students. Mileena transcribed the interviews and used the Oral History Metadata Synchronizer (<http://www.oralhistoryonline.org/>) to synchronize the transcripts with the videos, which allows for keyword searchability. As part of the project, MATRIX: the Center for Digital Humanities & Social Sciences, created a website, voices.archives.msu.edu. The interviews available on the website provide a fascinating look into the experiences of six minority students and faculty, and MSU's culture.



Interviewee Dr. Joe T. Darden, a professor of Geography, and former Dean of the Urban Affairs Programs.

More oral histories will be added to *Voices of MSU* in the future. Suggestions for interviewees can be submitted via email to archives@msu.edu. Opportunities for partnerships with others engaging in similar oral history project who would like to use the *Voices* website to make their oral histories publically accessible are also being explored.

By Megan Badgley-Malone, Collections & Outreach Archivist, Michigan State University Archives & Historical Collections

***See more on MSU Libraries
Accessing Digitized Oral Histories on line,
Women's Overseas Service League,
and Michigan Supreme Court Justices
starting on p. 5.***

MSU Libraries, Continued from p. 5

We are always looking for ways improve our site and the collections we present in the digital repository, and we welcome your feedback!

References

1. Michigan State University Libraries. "G. Robert Vincent Voice Library." <https://lib.msu.edu/vvl/>
2. Michigan State University Libraries. "Digital Repository." <https://d.lib.msu.edu>
3. Michigan State University Libraries. "Women's Overseas Service League Oral Histories." <https://d.lib.msu.edu/wosl>
4. Michigan State University Libraries. "Interviews with Michigan Supreme Court Justices." <https://d.lib.msu.edu/mscj>

Michigan PBB

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The project is in the very early stages. To date, we have collected around 18 hours of audio. Interviews have been focused on farm families, but we have talked to some consumers and individuals involved with litigation and the public health study. We'll also be interviewing veterinarians, chemical workers, St. Louis residents, and hopefully, public officials. We aim to cast a wide net to gather a diversity of perspectives.

Public officials failed to recognize the broader implications of PBB contamination at the time: for close to a year, nearly 8 million Michigan residents had also consumed farm products containing PBB. The investigation of long-term health effects, initiated by the state in 1976 and transferred to Emory University in 2011, is among the longest running public health studies in U.S. history. When Velsicol Chemical (formerly Michigan Chemical), the manufacturer of PBB, closed its doors in 1978, it left behind a community on the brink of economic collapse, as well as four dangerously contaminated sites in Gratiot County—now designated Superfund sites that, combined, rank among the costliest cleanup efforts in the Environmental Protection Agency's history.

Yet, few Americans—including Michiganders—are aware of this tragic poisoning of people and place. In fact, when most think about environmental and social justice issues in Michigan, the Flint water crisis comes to mind; or, the Enbridge oil spill near Marshall that contaminated Talmadge Creek and the Kalamazoo River with hundreds of thousands of gallons of crude oil. And now the state faces an emerging PFAS crisis. These episodes are connected. Taken together, they demonstrate the necessity of experts to communicate the products of their work to stakeholders and public officials, the power of an engaged and civic-minded citizenry, and the importance of local knowledge in deepening our understanding of environmental and human health.

Yet, few Americans—including Michiganders—are aware of this tragic poisoning of people and place.

The special research collection created by this oral history project will raise awareness of this important history as well as fill a significant gap in the existing historical record. The team of researchers consists of graduate and undergraduate students in the History, Public History, and Cultural Resource Management Programs at Central Michigan University, and is directed by Brittany Fremion, Assistant Professor of History. Our work has been informed, supported, and guided by community members and the research team led by Dr. Michele Marcus at Emory University, which maintains The Michigan PBB Registry. Recently, we have partnered with researchers at the University of Michigan to identify opportunities to translate public health research and oral histories for policy makers. Our hope is that this project will help to produce more innovative, inclusive, and community-based solutions for the environmental and human health realities we currently face, as well as enable us to confront our toxic past.

Once complete, materials will be preserved in the Museum of Cultural and Natural History at Central Michigan University. For more information, please contact Brittany Fremion, Department of History, at 989-774-1094 or fremi1b@cmich.edu.

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MSU Libraries Provides New Ways to Access Digitized Oral Histories Online

By Megan Kudzia and Robin Dean, Digital Projects, MSU Libraries

Michigan State University Libraries provides free online access to two digitized oral history collections through its open-source platform for digital collections, the MSU Libraries Digital Repository. These collections, “Interviews with Michigan Supreme Court Justices” and “Women’s Overseas Service League Oral Histories,” are a small sample of the oral histories held by MSU Libraries, particularly in the G. Robert Vincent Voice Library. Items in the digital repository receive our highest level of digital preservation, and are presented so users can listen, download files, and search the contents online.

Women's Overseas Service League

The Women’s Overseas Service League (WOSL) project was the result of a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission to digitize and make publicly available a collection of oral histories recorded by women who served abroad in some capacity during a conflict in which American soldiers served. The original recordings are held by several institutions; most are at Michigan State University or the University of Texas San Antonio.

Due to changes in storage conditions over the years, some the original tape recordings were in rough shape. In particular, a few that had been exposed to humidity developed the gumminess known as sticky-shed syndrome and had to be baked (that’s right, in the oven!). Once we digitized the recordings, we still had a lot of work to do getting them ready for public consumption.

One particular challenge was finding a way to automate transcript creation for the collection, and then to take the automated output and get it into a file type and format that our digital repository would accept. We were able to successfully complete this work and create time-coded transcripts for each recording. Unfortunately, the accuracy of the automatically generated transcripts was very poor. However, they remain useful for keyword searching until we can add more accurate transcripts.

The Women’s Overseas Service League recordings were made by women, recounting women’s stories. The group formed as a mutual support network for women who served abroad in any capacity during World War I, who may not have been in the armed service. WOSL originally existed as local units that eventually banded together to form a national organization. Our oral history collection spans conflicts from WWI through the Gulf War.

Michigan Supreme Court Justices

The “Interviews with Michigan Supreme Court Justices” collection contains interviews conducted by the Michigan Supreme Court Historical Society between 1990-2007 with 16 justices and clerks who served on the Michigan Supreme Court. Working in partnership with the Historical Society, MSU Libraries provides access to the digitized interviews and transcripts. The collection is available through the Vincent Voice Library website, and was also added to the digital repository as part of a pilot project in 2017 with a UW Madison iSchool practicum student, Brian Farrell.

The digital repository version of the project provides access to and preserves the highest quality digital files, in addition to transcripts and access versions of the files. Because some of the full interviews are hours long, preservation copies of the entire interviews were occasionally so large that they were difficult to upload or transfer in our system. The team decided to break the digital files into smaller sections that matched breaks in the original interviews where possible, but kept the transcript files together as single documents. The digital repository team is currently working on adding full-text search of transcript files in the repository.

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**Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives
Brown Bag Presentation Recordings
Available on the MSU Library website**

John Beck, School of Human Resources & Labor Relations

- November 19 - "Critical Lifelines: The Lives and Work of Personal Care Workers" - Clare Luz and Khalid Ibrahim, MSU College of Human Medicine
- November 27 - "Changing the Narrative: Refugees and Social Workers in Germany" - Johanna Schuster-Craig, MSU Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, Asian and African Languages
- January 17 - "Motor City Pop Culture: 111 Years of Mixing, Bottling and Trucking Faygo on Detroit's Near East Side" - Joe Grimm, MSU School of Journalism and author of The Faygo Book (Wayne State University Press, 2018)
- March 28 - "I Want Equal Pay for Equal Work: Latinas and Black Women at Bell Telephone in Michigan, 1968-1980" - Delia Fernandez, MSU Department of History (co-sponsored by the MSU Chicano Latino Studies Program, the MSU Julian Samora Research Institute and the MSU Center for Gender in Global Context)

A wonderful audio resource is the last few years of Our Daily Work/Our Daily Lives brown bag presentations which have been recorded and cataloged at the Vincent Voice Library at MSU. All of these audio materials can be accessed and used on any computer, anywhere through the MSU Library on-line catalog. You check out all the current recorded offerings from the brown bag series by clicking on the link below. There are over 110 recordings currently listed with more to come (you can refresh the search page and get the entire listing).

Check out the list

at:<http://catalog.lib.msu.edu/search~S39?/Your+daily+work+our+daily+lives&searchscope=39&SORT=D/Your+daily+work+our+daily+lives&searchscope=39&SORT=D&SUBKEY=our+daily+work+our+daily+lives/101%2C206%2C206%2CB/browse>

"Our Daily Work/ Our Daily Lives" is a cooperative project of the Michigan Traditional Arts Program (MSU Museum) and the Labor Education Program (MSU School of Human Resources and Labor Relations). For more information on the MSU Museum and its exhibits and events, go to the website: <http://museum.msu.edu>. For more information concerning the Labor Education Program and the School for Human Resources and Labor Relations, go to the website: <http://www.hrlr.msu.edu>.

The Kalamazoo Wings

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Participating Interviewees:

Stephen Doherty, a part of the K-Wings organization from 1978-2001, talks about the origins of the K-Wings hockey team, the history of the green ice game, and why hockey is an important part of Kalamazoo, on [YouTube](#).

Pam Shebest, local Kalamazoo sports writer, discusses her memories covering the K-Wings and her trip to Danbury, CT, for the Colonial Cup Championships, on [YouTube](#).

Lynda Stewart, who was the longest running "Slappy" mascot, from 1993-2013, talks about the birth of Slappy, what anonymity means to a mascot, and some mishaps on the ice, on [YouTube](#).

Sue Richardson, a former K-Wings Booster and longtime season ticket holder, recounts the evolution of the team, the Turner Cup Championships, and what makes the K-Wings franchise special, on [YouTube](#)

Clark Osborne, K-Wings trainer 1982-87 and 1993-2000, reflects on his experiences with the K-Wings family and how hockey players are in a league of their own when it comes to toughness, on [YouTube](#).

https://www.kalamazoomuseum.org/localhistory/stories/kwings_oralhistory.html

The Kalamazoo Valley Museum is operated by Kalamazoo Valley Community College and is governed by its Board of Trustees.

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of Directors**

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OHA in Montreal

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Censorship

Against the general current of more diverse oral history research and more accessible oral history collections, there are other trends to think about. One dark trend impacting oral history research and academia generally is state censorship. In a very affecting keynote, Layla Neyzi of Sabanci University noted the Turkish Republic's prosecution of academics who signed a peace petition advocating an end to the latest civil war with Kurds in Turkey. She herself still has to answer charges of facilitating "terrorist propaganda" which carries a hefty prison term. She argued that her experience is not only a function of specific circumstances in Turkey but global trends towards authoritarian nationalism. The work many of us do to feature the stories of marginalized people can be construed as a threat to national myths, national unity, and, most ominously, national security. While American "culture wars" may not lead to state repression, we know they can have a chilling effect on private and public support for journalism, the liberal arts, and social research.

Poster Exhibits

Posters featured work presented only in exhibit form as well as additions to presentations in session panels. An example was research from King's College London on oral historians with digital collections. Some 43% of those researchers surveyed anonymized parts of their collections in order to share the substance of them. That is a high percentage of self-described oral historians. It is another countervailing trend to transparency and accessibility in oral history research and collection development. Protecting sources is usually thought of as something journalists do and confidentiality as a crucial tool in other kinds of social research. But, as oral historians explore sensitive or controversial subjects and interviewees become more aware of privacy concerns in the digital age, what role might confidentiality/anonymity play in oral history research?

**Take a look at the program on the OHA website
(www.oralhistory.org).**

2019 OHA Conference: Next year's conference theme will be "*Pathways in the Field: Considerations for Those Working In, On, and Around Oral History.*"

Salt Lake City, Utah

October 16-20.

Deadline for proposals is February 3, 2019

(Yikes! That's pretty soon.)

KALAMAZOO WINGS ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

*By Tammy Barnes, Material Culture Manager,
Kalamazoo Valley Museum*

Your Kalamazoo Wings! The First 45 Years explores the history and culture of Kalamazoo's oldest professional sports franchise. The exhibit features artifacts and images on loan from team leaders and fans.

The Kalamazoo Valley Museum recently embarked on a project to document the story of its beloved Kalamazoo Wings hockey team - celebrating their 45th year. The resulting exhibit and oral histories are now available at the museum and on its website. The oral histories were conducted this past summer and explored the origins of the team, the excitement of the three championship seasons, the evolution of hockey, the work of a mascot, and the innovation of the worlds first colored ice game.

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**Promote Your Project!
Submit newsletter or website
features, ideas, information,
and news to:
newsletter@michiganoha.org.**

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