



*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*

### **2015 Winner of MotorCities National Heritage Area Award of Excellence**

The Lansing-MotorCities Partnership-Lansing Stewardship Community received the top award for Education/Interpretation by the MotorCities National Heritage Area. The collaboration was responsible for the creation, preservation and extension of the UAW Local 602 oral history collection.

In 2005 John Beck, Associate Professor, and a team from the Michigan State University (MSU) School of Labor and Industrial Relations worked with leadership and members of United Auto Workers Local 602 to train UAW members in techniques of oral history interviewing. They created an astonishing audio record of life related to the Lansing Fisher Body Plant at its closing in 2006. For over a decade, this Lansing Stewardship Community has been the home to a strong partnership between UAW Local 602, the RE Olds Museum and various individuals and units at MSU working together to advance automotive and labor history and community education and research resources. The origin of this partnership was the gap between the closure of Lansing's General Motors Verlinden plant in 2005 and the 2006 opening of its replacement, the Lansing Delta Township Plant. Members of UAW Local 602 were in the Jobs Bank during the break in production and were involved in a variety of education and community service projects. One of the efforts undertaken in the period was the creation of a local union history committee as envisioned by the then local union president Douglas Rademacher. This committee was trained in a Michigan State University-sponsored oral history workshop conducted by Geneva Kebler Wiskemann of the Michigan Oral History Association. After training, committee members interviewed over 120 individuals

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*Receiving the Award of Excellence: Bill Reed, present Local 602 President; Doug Rademacher, Union 602 President and Lead when 602 Oral History project conducted; Geneva Kebler Wiskemann, MOHA trainer; and John Beck, Assoc. Professor of MSU School of Human Resources and Labor Relations.*

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## About the Michigan Oral History Association

### Mission

The mission of the Michigan Oral History Association (MOHA) is to provide for 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 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. It 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. They contribute their energy and expertise without pay.



*Workshop attendees at Michigan State University Retirees Association in December, with discussion by John Revitte and Pauline Adams on conducting oral history interviews. Further information on MSU Retirees in the next newsletter issue.*

### How Can MOHA Help You?

Beginning oral historians can attend workshops, receive oral history manuals, and find advice and resources from the professional oral historians in MOHA. Experienced oral historians can benefit by meeting 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 projects. Through mutual efforts, we can improve the quality and quantity of oral histories in our state.

### 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.

**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 [gwiskemann@arq.net](mailto:gwiskemann@arq.net) or (517) 321-1746.

## Guidelines for Transcribing Oral Histories

By Lynn Simmons

### My Background

I have been a court reporter and a transcriber for around 40 years, and making my work easier has been a major focus of my work. In that time I have transcribed hundreds of oral histories. When it comes to transcribing oral histories, they are a special kind of transcription.

### Cost of Transcription

When planning an oral history project, one question to ask when figuring out the cost of the project is how much will a transcript cost? There are two ways of paying for transcribing: by the hour and by the page. Paying by the hour at first seems like a practical plan, but depending on how efficient the transcriber is, it may prove to be the most expensive. Paying by the page allows for a better estimate. I have found that generally speaking two minutes of recording equals one page of transcript. It's not exact, but reasonably close. This would be a page that has 25 lines double spaced with a wider left margin than the right, to allow room for binding the transcript. Double spacing makes it easier to read for corrections. So a 60-minute interview would be a 30-page transcript. When I quote my price for completing a transcript, I include one revision to get to the final copy. If more than one revision is contemplated, then that would have to be built into the pricing.

### Conducting the Interview

As in court transcript work, the transcript has to be able to stand on its own and be meaningful. Even though an interview may be video recorded, what the person says needs to make sense on paper. For example, saying something was "this big" is probably being used to describe an item. The interviewer needs to follow up with an estimate of the size: "three feet." If photos are being described, naming people from left to right rather than randomly will make the inclusion of the photo in the final transcript

***"...the transcript has to be able to stand on its own and be meaningful."***

meaningful. If the person is describing an object, naming it as well as telling how it was used will help a future reader understand what is being described. Also, I have found that when people are describing a photo or an object, they often drop their voice. That can create a problem for the transcriber because time has to be taken to adjust the volume of the transcribing program.

### Setting of the Recording

The setting of a recording really matters. If it is being done in a controlled situation, like a studio, this is really not an issue. The most important aspect from a transcriber's point of view is that the volume of the recording for the

***"A kitchen, while very inviting, is one of the noisiest rooms in the house."***

speakers be balanced. If one is much louder than the other, then the transcriber is continually having to adjust the volume of the playback, and that takes a lot of extra time. If the recording is taking place in a home or some other location, the background noises can make a huge difference in the ability to transcribe the recording. A kitchen, while very inviting, is one of the noisiest rooms in the house: the refrigerator, a ticking clock, a tile floor that results in a certain echo effect. An animal in the background can make it difficult. A panting dog for example can drown out a soft-spoken interviewee. Rattling of papers is also disruptive to the recording. So if you are pulling out documents to be reviewed, do not speak during that process or ask the interviewee to repeat something that might have been obliterated by these noises.

***Next Issue: Working with a transcriber, verbatim or edited transcript, the transcribing process, and becoming a transcriber.***

## Treasure Hunter

*By Sherry Tuffin*

I got started listening to the stories my grandmother would tell me when I was a child. I learned very quickly that beneath what appears to be an average, unexciting veneer is often a treasure trove of stories, experiences, dreams, and wisdom. I developed an insatiable curiosity about people and their lives. Eventually, I was questioning every family member, any friend I could corner and even strangers willing to share their stories with me.

Then one day I heard two words that would literally change my life – oral history. You mean people actively collect stories in an organized, professional manner? YIKES! I felt like I had won the lottery. I couldn't wait to cash in and collect my winnings. Little did I realize that no lottery could enrich me as much as being an oral historian.

I knew from personal experience that people don't usually broadcast their life stories without some encouragement. (I discount braggarts because my experience has been that the louder they blow their own horn the weaker their story.) Sometimes people hesitate to tell me their story because they don't think



think anyone would be interested. They say things like, “Do you really want to hear about that?” I have to reassure them that I really do want to hear their story. Or maybe it's because they think it's too boastful to recount their accomplishments. That's when I hear things like, “I really didn't do much” or “I was just lucky.” After listening to their stories I usually find those modest statements are totally

incorrect. I have learned that heroes come in many shapes, sizes and situations. I expected to enjoy hearing oral histories... and I do. But what I didn't expect was the two greatest rewards I received when I decided to collect oral histories.

The first amazing jewel I discovered was the extraordinary people I meet. We all want to bask in the glow of people with special talents or incredible charisma. People stand in long lines for hours and pay top dollar for the thrill of hearing their favorite singer or to meet a movie star or to get an autograph from a sports legend. Well, here's a bulletin – you are surrounded by the incredible, amazing people every day and you don't have to wait in line or pay a hefty admission charge to get close to them. Maybe your Aunt Lucy was on the front lines of the civil rights movement or your next door neighbor fought in the Battle of Okinawa or your English teacher overcame growing up in a dysfunctional family or the cashier at your grocery store overcame a life-threatening disease. Look for these incredible people with fascinating stories and you will find them. Guaranteed.

The second gem I found was the friendships that developed. When you begin exploring the lives of these people and they allow you into their lives a strong bond is created. Your fascination with the story soon morphs into a fascination with the storyteller. What ensues is a unique friendship that enriches both the storyteller and the listener.

The good news for treasure hunters (aka oral historians) is that you don't need to travel to the four corners of the globe carrying a map with an “X” or dig too deep to find these treasures. Just look around you – they're everywhere.

## Motor Cities Award,

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connected to the history and current life of the closing VerLinden plant: union and management leaders, production and maintenance workers, and local area businesses and neighbors who had grown up in the shadow of the plant.

UAW Local 602 worked with MSU's Vincent Voice Library to ensure that these oral histories would be preserved and made available for community use and educational and research application. The library staff (including Shawn Nicholson, John Shaw and former autoworker and UAW 602 member Kevin Beard), with the aid of Motorcities grant funding, created a web-based gallery where all the Local 602 resources (the recordings, photos and other materials collected by the committee) could be easily accessed through an easy-to-use portal. Earlier oral history interviews conducted by MSU History professor Lisa Fine with REO manufacturing workers and managers were added to the UAW Local 602 collection to make this a more complete resource on Lansing-based automobile production.

An additional Michigan State University project furthered the extent and reach of the original UAW Local 602-created resource. With Motorcities grant funding, MSU researchers Ruben Martinez and Daniel Velez Ortiz utilized the oral histories as the basis of a MSU Museum exhibit on Latinos in the auto industry, a resident and traveling exhibit in conjunction with the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the University's Julian Samora Research Institute.

*The MotorCities National Heritage Area is a non-profit affiliate of the National Park Service and one of 49 National Heritage Areas in the U.S. Through educational programming, grant funding, outreach, tourism and more, MotorCities preserves, promotes and interprets auto and labor heritage in southeast Michigan.*



*John D. Shaw, MSU Vincent Voice Library, Geneva Kebler Wiskemann, Peter Glendinning, MSU Professor of Art. Photos courtesy of Margaret Hehr, Photographer*

## Photo Exhibit UAW Local 602 Interviews

A permanent exhibit of photographic portraits and recordings has been developed for the RE Olds Museum in Lansing. MSU Professor of Art and Art Design Peter Glendinning, working with Bill Adcock and the RE Olds Museum, created a series of unique and creative portraits of the Local 602 oral history participants available to be photographed. He also created a photographic record of personal belongings and other artifacts key to our understanding of the lives of these automotive workers, managers and community members.

"In each interview there are stories that are uniquely individual," notes Glendinning, "which of course means they are universal, such as a 'first day at work'." He listened to all of the interviews and selected three-minute segments of one-hour-long interviews that were really important to the individuals. There is the new supervisor who found it hard to discipline people he worked with, the first female pipefitter at the plant, playing radio music on the night shift, the dirty jobs, and pranks. There is a broad range of experiences, providing a sense of life at the plant, and their significance in history.

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## **Hmong Memory Film Premiere**

**Monday February 15, 4:00 PM  
Kellogg Center, Lansing**

*Hmong Memory at the Crossroads* is a transnational documentary film, released in 2015. Set in the United States, France and Laos, the documentary tells the story of Liachoua Lee, a Hmong-American from Rochester Hills, Michigan, who revisits his past as a former refugee and son of Hmong veterans of the French Indochina War (1946-1954), and of the American Secret War in Laos (1961-1975) and the emotional scars left by the war. Lee's story begins in Detroit, Michigan, then takes him to France, a place where he and his family sought asylum before immigrating to America, and ends in an emotional return to the homeland Laos for the first time in 40 years.

An MSU production, this documentary was produced in partnership with the Humanities Without Walls (HWW) Consortium, based at Illinois Program for Research in the Humanities at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, funded by Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. As project PI, MSU Professor Safoi Babana-Hampton filled the roles of producer, executive producer, director, and screenwriter. Safoi worked collaboratively with a diverse team of established researchers from various disciplines in the US and France, including co-directors MSU professor Swarnavel Eswaran-Pillai and French documentarian Cyril Payen, several researchers from MSU and the HWW Consortium, from the Lansing area, including Oral Historian Martha Bloomfield, and from the Hmong community in the US and France.

Through an oral history approach, the film seeks to explore the way the process of remembering legacies of global past conflicts informs and enables present efforts to build more reconciled, just and stronger communities and shape Hmong diasporic identities, by way of highlighting how former Hmong refugees and their children negotiate their place as citizens in the United States and France.

To know more about the film:

**Trailer:** <http://hmc.cal.msu.edu/film-trailer/>

**Official website:** <http://hmc.cal.msu.edu/>

**Official poster:** <http://hmc.cal.msu.edu/poster/>

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/hmongmemory>

**Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/hmongmemory>

## **Hmong Americans in Michigan**

Martha Bloomfield has conducted extensive research on the Hmong American community in Michigan which culminated in writing the book *Hmong Americans in Michigan*. Because of this work, the oral history interviews, and her established contacts with this community, Michigan State University Professor Safoi Babana-Hampton asked for Bloomfield's participation in the MSU documentary film project. The result was engagement in deeper conversations, additional oral histories with the film team, and enhanced understanding of the Hmong people in the process of making the film.

To learn more about the book which MSU Press published, please see:

<http://msupress.org/books/book/?id=50-1D0-3459#.VnCWTSDFHw>

***Please submit newsletter ideas, information, news, and features to:***

***Marci Cameron at  
cameronlady210@comcast.net.***

### ***Photo Exhibit***

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"It felt natural to photograph them because I felt I knew them from their stories. I wanted them to just be themselves, which is what I wanted to convey in their portraits. The people themselves were so enthusiastic about sharing their stories."

***Check out: [peterglending.com](http://peterglending.com), "Fisher Body Oral Histories 2013," for a sampling of portraits and "sound bar" to hear the stories!***

## Using Oral History in the Classroom

*By Jim Cameron*

Partnerships between your organization - whether museum, historical society, or archives - and local high schools or middle schools promote quality history instruction while adding resources for your organization. How do you get teachers to partner with you? Below are some important educational aspects to support your coordination with school personnel and to help sell your partnership.

### Why Oral History in the Classroom?

Oral History:

- Includes Blooms Taxonomy: higher order thinking, analysis, synthesis, evaluation;
- Involves Howard Gardner's learning styles: interpersonal, verbal, inquisitive, and logical;
- Supports the Michigan Grade Level Content Expectations (GLCEs) and High School Content Expectations (HSCEs) and the MSTEP assessment;
- Involves a technical component;
- Promotes Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts-History/Social Studies;
- Encourages interactive, interdisciplinary, and intergenerational methods;
- Includes many of the History Habits of the Mind;
- Combines all of the above in a **product** that students and their families will enjoy for a lifetime.

### Common Core Connections:

Speaking and Listening Standards, grades 6-12  
Comprehension and Collaboration

1. Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners.
  - a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study;
  - b. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the curriculum discussion to broader themes or larger ideas.
2. Interpret information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g. visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.
3. Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

***Next Issue: How to prepare for the interview, ideas and resources for creating quality questions and a proper format for your oral history project, and what to include to complete, evaluate and share the interview.***

## MOHA Board of Directors

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***Karen Schaumann-Beltran discussing her oral history project with fellow historians.***

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*To receive the **MOHA newsletter electronically**, send an email to [MOHAnewsletter@gmail.com](mailto:MOHAnewsletter@gmail.com) with the word "newsletter" and a preferred email address.*

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**Michigan Oral History Association  
5580 West State Road  
Lansing MI 48906-9325**

**MOHA Forum: What's Happening in Oral History in the State of Michigan**

Projects – 50-Year church anniversary, community activists, training middle school students, experiences of Hmong Americans, issues of transcribing, State of Michigan updates, and newest technologies supporting oral interviews: These are some of the presentations and discussions exchanged at the November 2015 MOHA Forum. More such update/exchange forums are anticipated for presentation to MOHA members and visitors.



***Lydia Tang, Special Collections Librarian, Michigan State University Libraries, and new MOHA Board member, attending the November MOHA Forum.***