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## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



### "Times are Shitty"

By Troy Reeves

My son hadn't seen *Rent* yet, so we watched it while he was home for spring break. For those uninitiated to this work, I'm not going to summarize it here; that's why there are internet search engines. But my title comes from a lyric from one of its songs. And it seems apropos.

Starting at our February Council midwinter meeting and continuing through our April Council meeting, we talked about how to best

advocate for you all. We've landed on a few things that I'd like to tell you about now.

First, instead of us telling you what we think you want, we will set up several virtual community forums, starting in May and running up to our October annual meeting. These events will be facilitated by either two councilmembers or a councilmember and executive officer. They will both offer an opportunity for us to tell you what we've been doing/thinking and (more importantly) a chance for you all to update us about your work, needs, and ideas. So, look for an announcement—either elsewhere in this newsletter or in a future e-blast—for more details.

Second, we have joined many, many of our sister organizations by signing on to their statements pushing back against the many, many presidential orders that have been released since January 20. While some may see this as the low-hanging fruit of advocacy, this lets those organizations know that we hear, agree and stand with them. Or, in other words, we give them and ourselves strength in numbers.

Recently, Vice-President Sarah Milligan reminded me and the rest of Council that we never told you all that we have signed on to this type of statement. So, our wonderful executives—the Stev(ph)ens—built a [webpage](#) that shows the organization and a link to their statement. When we sign on to additional statements, we will remind you, in an e-blast or newsletter, of this page, so you all can look and see who else we hear, agree and stand with.

Third, we have asked the Advocacy Committee to return to our [Oral Historian at Risk](#) webpage, review it and let us and the Executive Office know what can stay, what needs to be added and what can be removed. So, the "royal we" will keep you posted on that effort.

Last, as far as when any official OHA-written statement will appear, we have decided we will write one if we can back it up with actions, because if I may finish with a line from another movie based on a Jonathan Larson musical, *Tick, Tick, Boom*, "actions speak louder than words." Although, I hope my words here show you all that we have and will continue to do meaningful work during these shitty times.



## ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR'S REPORT



By Steven Sielaff

My first year as associate director I was consumed with the goal of creating a new public website for the association. Since the website was launched in early 2024, I would occasionally remind myself that the member website, a completely different entity and environment, needed some attention as well. As we navigate myriad challenges and changes in 2025, I am happy to provide one positive development: the member site has been refreshed and new resources are just a few clicks away for all OHA members.

For the uninitiated, you can reach our member site via [this link](#) or at any time using the login button at the top right of the public OHA website. Once you login with your credentials you will see a general information page, and on your right in the side menu a [button](#) that says "Member

Landing Page.” It is here where you can access the members-only menu that includes the following services:

- **My Profile** - information which you can add/delete at any time and decide how visible you would like it to be.
- **Member Directory** – containing information for those members who opt in, this is where you can find additional details on our membership. Please note that this is separate from the “[Find an Oral Historian](#)” tool that lives on the public website, which requires a [different form](#) to join and is updated quarterly.
- **The OHR Online** – Your portal for online access to the *Oral History Review*--both the current issue and the archive of past issues from 1973 forward
- **Webinar & Workshop Recordings** -- Certain OHA content will be provided here as a members-only exclusive before it is transitioned to the public site, and all recent webinars can always be found here.
- **Symposia Recordings** -- Full recordings from our biennial virtual symposia can be found here approximately six months after the event moving forward. Recently we migrated the links to all the 2024 AI in OH panels here, and plan to add the 2022 Race and Power recordings soon.
- **Business Meeting Recordings** -- Beginning in 2024, the OHA annual business meeting moved to a virtual platform. You can find the recordings of this and future business meetings here, as well as any other recorded public forum events we may choose to hold moving forward.

We hope members can take advantage of these resources, but we are always looking for feedback as to what else members would like to see in this space. If you have an idea you would like to pass along or even have feedback on the current design/content, feel free to reach out via the [official OHA email address](#).

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## Volunteer Spotlight: Anne Valk

This month, the volunteer spotlight is on Anne Valk, who currently serves as the inaugural ombudsperson for the Oral History Association. The OHA Council appoints an ombudsperson to serve as a year-round point of contact for complaints of harassment or unprofessional conduct in our community. You can read more about that work [here](#). She also served as OHA president in 2015-16. She is a history professor at the City University of New York Graduate Center and serves as director of its [American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning](#). She previously taught at Brown University, Williams College and Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. She is the author of numerous books and articles dealing with oral history, one of which, *Living with Jim Crow: African American Women and Memories of the Segregated South*, co-authored with Leslie Brown, won the 2011 OHA Book Award.



**How and when did you first get involved with oral history?**

I first learned about oral history when I started graduate school. Faculty at Duke University, where I started a Ph.D., had offered oral history courses and coordinated oral history projects going back to the 1970s. I arrived when Duke's Center for Documentary Studies began a large, multiyear project to interview elderly African American southerners about community, work, family and politics during the period of legal segregation. I was lucky enough to be hired to help coordinate that project, and it all started from there.

**How and when did you first get involved with the OHA?**

I attended my first OHA conference in 1993 in Birmingham. I remember a spellbinding keynote speech by Julian Bond who spoke about the role of "everyday people" during the civil rights movement and the many ways that their experiences helped expand historians' definition of activism. In addition to Bond's memorable presentation, I was so impressed by the friendliness of people at the conference – the sense that I was welcome at OHA was such a contrast to other, much more stuffy, academic gatherings that I had attended. Although I've shifted jobs several times since, and I haven't always been directly engaged in doing or teaching oral history, the OHA has felt like my professional "home." I've attended the conference regularly since then.

**What OHA activities or governance roles have you been involved with? Why those particular ones?**

Over the years, I've served on several OHA committees (nominating, awards, etc.). Each time I have had the chance to meet more members and to learn about the organization's good work in new ways. In 2001, along with Leslie Brown and Jessica Wiederhorn, I was program chair for the St. Louis conference, held just a month after 9/11. Chairing the conference with Leslie and Jessica, under the leadership of incoming president Mary Marshall Clark, gave me an inside look at how the organization runs and broadened my understanding of the larger field.

I also was president from 2015-2016. That was a tough year, beginning with Executive Director Cliff Kuhn's sudden death shortly after the conference and ending with my own partner's death the next summer. Although that was an incredibly hard time for me personally, the organization kept moving forward thanks to the dedication, conscientiousness and caring of the OHA leadership. I've since learned, too, that those traits genuinely reflect the OHA's core values and are embodied in so many of the people who belong to the organization.

**What has been the most rewarding aspect of volunteering for OHA?**

Most recently, I have been OHA's ombudsperson, available to talk with members and guests if issues of harassment, discrimination, retaliation or other misconduct arise at our in-person conferences. I've enjoyed this role as a way to help advance OHA's mission to be an inclusive organization: as researchers and oral historians, we can only do our best work when we are treated with respect and dignity.

**What has been most challenging about OHA volunteering?**

There's just never enough time!

**What advice would you give to an OHA newcomer about becoming an OHA volunteer?**

The organization offers so many ways for people to get involved, and unlike many professional organizations, it is relatively open to newcomers and practitioners with "unconventional" backgrounds. In fact, OHA's committees often are looking for more people to join in. So don't wait for an invitation if there's work that you want to do. Contact the Executive Office, reach out to someone on Council or introduce yourself to a committee chair and let them know about your interest.

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# New Program Associate

When the Oral History Association's new program associate Leslie An moves from New York to OHA headquarters in Waco, Texas, this summer, it'll be her first trip to Baylor University. And her first trip to Texas, for that matter.

And while her New York City-area family isn't sure about her move, Leslie said she's looking forward to it.

"It took some convincing for them to think it's a good idea," she said. But she's ready for a change.

Leslie graduated in 2021 from Dartmouth College where she majored in history, which, she said, taught her "how to think bigger."

She was involved in a Shakespearean acting troupe and an a capella singing group. Among her other activities at Dartmouth, she also worked as a 3D animation teaching assistant in the computer science department and was involved with the Big Sib, Little Sib mentoring program for which she designed and led activities to educate local families about South Korean culture. She also conducted interviews with NASA leadership and principal investigators of space missions during a six-month NASA internship to develop a book on the agency's Explorers Program.

Back in New York, Leslie worked as a freelance photographer, editorial assistant, and production assistant. And aside from work, she's an avid chess player, passionate creative non-fiction writer and documentary-maker and, by her own description, has a self-deprecating sense of humor.

OHA Executive Director Stephen Sloan noted the varied experiences she brings to the program associate position. "We are so excited to have Leslie An as part of the team," he said. "Her interest in history, passion for storytelling and creative energy will all be of great benefit to our community in having her in this role."

Leslie, who started working remotely as OHA's program associate in March, said she's drawn to academic environments and appreciates the welcoming atmosphere of a college campus.

She said she'll miss easy access to Trader Joe's, and she noted that Waco appears to lack a Korean grocery store. But she's up for learning about the legendary Texas-based Buc-ee's gas station-convenience store chain. And she said she's looking forward to meeting in person the OHA folks at Baylor, who already seem to be glad she's part of OHA.

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## OHA Conference Update

By Autumn Brown, Oklahoma State University

Conference Planning Team

Here are some highlights Oral History Association members can look forward to at this fall's annual conference at the Crowne Plaza Atlanta Midtown Hotel from Oct. 15-18.

First, we are happy to announce that this year's keynote speaker will be Bettina Love, the William F. Russell Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University. Love is the author of the bestseller *We Want to do More Than Survive*, winner of the 2020 Society of Professors of Education Outstanding Book Award. Most recently Love authored the New York Times bestseller *Punished for Dreaming: How School Reform Harms Black Children and How We Heal*.

Love uses this text to reckon with the impact of 40 years of racist public-school policy on generations of Black lives. She argues that Reagan's presidency ushered in a War on Black Children, pathologizing and penalizing them in concert with the War on Drugs. Love is a co-founder of the Abolitionist Teaching Network (ATN), whose mission is to develop and support teachers and parents fighting injustice within their schools and communities.

We also are looking forward to our plenary sessions, which will be hosted both on Wednesday and Thursday of the conference. Wednesday's plenary will be a film screening of Pulitzer Prize-winning author Douglas A. Blackmon's documentary, "The Harvest: Integrating Mississippi's Schools." The plenary session will take a look at the history of America's education system and its ongoing implications for the nation. Moderated by Charles Bolton, history professor at the University of North Carolina Greensboro and author of *The Hardest Deal of All: The Battle Over School Integration in Mississippi, 1870-1980*, panelists will use Mississippi as a microcosm for the legal and political issues still impacting the entire nation.

Thursday's plenary is titled, "What does this moment require?: The Relationship of Oral History to Organizing." This plenary is an invitation and challenge to oral history practitioners to consider oral history as an organizing tool to challenge authoritarianism. Dominant narratives demand forgetting. And the story of struggle, particularly of marginalized people, is the first to be memory holed. Panelists will discuss and pose questions about the role of oral history in building collective power.

Some new features that participants will have to look forward to will include a Teacher Professional Development, to be hosted Saturday morning by Local Learning: The National Network for Folk Arts in Education. It will focus on teaching with primary sources and will include special guest Stevie "Dr. View" Johnson, a DJ, producer, educator and community organizer.

Dr. View is the founder and executive producer of *Fire in Little Africa*, a multimedia hip hop project that included a hip hop album signed to Motown Records, an award-winning documentary, podcast and curriculum inspired by Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Dr. View is the 2023 Nasir Jones Hip Hop Fellow at Harvard University and assistant professor of creative practice in popular music in the School of Music at The Ohio State University. Dr. View also produced the album that supplements the text *Punished for Dreaming*, authored by Bettina Love.

We are also happy to announce that the block party will be returning this year!

As it was last year, the OHA annual business meeting will be held separately from the annual conference. The virtual business meeting is scheduled for Sept. 30, 2:30 to 4 p.m. CDT. Stay tuned for more details.

Lastly, we are excited about the opportunity to collaborate with the American Folklore Society's (AFS) annual conference, set for Oct. 18-21 also at the Crowne Plaza Atlanta Midtown. There will be a \$75 day rate for AFS members to attend OHA's conference on Saturday, and a \$175 rate for AFS members to join OHA for the full duration of the conference.

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## Dismissed Federal Historian Sparks Oral History Project

On Valentine's Day, Food and Drug Administration historian Jason Chernesky was among hundreds of probationary federal employees who received notice they were out of a job.

Like countless others, he said he was scared. But it didn't take long for his professional instincts to kick in with a determination to turn the situation into something positive.

Chernesky earned bachelor's and master's degrees in history from Rutgers University and a doctorate in the history of science from the University of Pennsylvania, where he learned the value of oral histories while completing his dissertation focusing on pediatric AIDS.

Chernesky, who described himself as "just some guy in Baltimore, Maryland, working in my home office," posted a query on Reddit: "I was wondering if any other recently terminated employees would be interested in forming an oral history project about our experiences coping with this drastic change in our lives and the federal government."

He wasn't sure what to expect, but he created a SurveyMonkey, soon replaced by an online form on the Organization of American Historians' website, and by mid-April more than 550 people have responded that they want to be interviewed. And more than 40 respondents have volunteered to conduct interviews.

"There's a great volunteer spirit that has been captured here," he said.

Chernesky credits OHA Executive Director Stephen Sloan with "jumping on right away" and becoming part of a four-person advisory group helping Chernesky bring the project to fruition. In addition to Sloan, the advisers include:

- David Caruso, director of the Center for Oral History at Philadelphia's Science History Institute and former editor of the Oral History Review,
- Amy Sullivan, history professor at Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, whose oral history work includes research on the impact of the opioid crisis, and
- Vanessa Burrows, who headed the FDA history office before Chernesky. She took another position at the FDA from which she was also dismissed, he said.

Chernesky outlined three reasons he considers it important to establish a systematic effort to collect oral histories of federal workers and contractors affected by the administration's cuts. First, he said, historians always look for documentation to answer their questions. His interviews with more than 20 nurses as part of his dissertation research "got me really hooked on oral history" as a way to create new historical resources. Additionally, he said, oral histories are a significant part of recordkeeping at the FDA, which is also the case at other federal agencies. Oral histories capture individual experiences and voices that are part of the institutional knowledge that can get lost if it's not documented. Finally, he cited the rapid response efforts to engage in oral history interviewing during the covid pandemic as an inspiration.

Chernesky said current discussions envision a three-year project, perhaps expanding to longitudinal interviewing, much like Columbia University's 9/11 oral history work. Similar interviewing projects got underway in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Chernesky noted that not everyone thinks of the current upheaval affecting many federal workers as a crisis. But it certainly amounts to rapid change in people's lives, he said, which oral

history interviews can document in real time.

Given the sensitivity of the topics and interviewees concerned about retribution, Chernesky said some of the interviews may be embargoed altogether and others may be de-identified if published online.

In the short term, practical efforts include finding funding, creating a web presence and identifying a permanent home for the interviews and other materials the project will generate. Chernesky said it is important to find a repository that can ensure a secure, long-term home to maintain the collection.

Chernesky is in the process of developing a pre-interview survey for people who have expressed interest in participating. He said he wants to ensure that people understand the interview process and will include links to the OHA's Principles and Best Practices. He also envisions developing training for volunteer interviewers and figuring out how to reach affected federal workers who do not live in the Washington, D.C., metro area, where much of the attention has been focused.

Meanwhile, Chernesky is working to turn his dissertation into a book and is hunting for a new job.

To learn more about the collaboration of the OHA and OAH with Chernesky, check out: <https://oralhistory.org/2025/04/11/call-for-participants-new-joint-oral-history-project-on-federal-workers/> and <https://www.oah.org/2025/03/04/federal-employees-oral-history-project/>

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## **Ypsilanti Oral History Project Focuses on BIPOC Farmers, Gardeners in Urban Setting**

### **By Finn Bell, University of Michigan Dearborn**

“[Growing food] is important because if you know the history, our history, we were brought here as enslaved people to grow food because we were the ones, the experts.” Patricia Wells

Patricia Wells is a Master Gardener who grew up in a tight-knit African American community in Detroit in the 1950s and 60s. Calling herself a “child of the Great Migration and a child of the wall,” which marked the literal segregation between Detroit and the surrounding white suburbs along Eight Mile Road, she described her neighborhood as one filled with abundant farms, gardens and fruit trees, all free for the picking.

As an adult, her passion for growing food was reignited after her son was tragically killed at work over a few dollars. Wells believes that a “hungry man is an angry man” and that this is likely to worsen as environmental degradation intensifies. Wells, now living in Ypsilanti, Michigan, devotes her retirement years to teaching young people to “put a penny in the ground and pull out a dollar.” She strongly feels the need to be connected to the land and to her ancestors and was excited to narrate an oral history and help successfully launch the Ypsi Farmers & Gardeners Oral History Project.

The Ypsi Farmers & Gardeners Oral History Project (available at <https://history.ypsilibrary.org/ypsilanti-farmers-gardeners/>) is a community-driven, public digital humanities archive housed at the Ypsilanti District Library (YDL) and funded by the University of Michigan (UM) Arts Initiative, the Michigan Humanities Council and the Office of Community-Engaged Learning at UM-Dearborn.



The project provides a platform for Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and/or working-class farmers and gardeners in Ypsilanti to tell their own stories, thereby safeguarding cultural resources and fostering community resilience. The oral histories show the shared historical roots of climate change, colonialism and enslavement, as well as the dislocating cultural effects of gentrification. In sharing the wisdom of gardening elders like Wells, the project builds climate resilience and food security, given the importance of small-scale agriculture in times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ypsilanti is a small, postindustrial city in southeast Michigan that has been directly impacted by climate change due to more intense storms, flooding, power outages and wildfire smoke. BIPOC and working-class people in Ypsilanti face additional risks from climate change because its closest neighbor, Ann Arbor, has been identified as a “climate destination.” [See <https://theweek.com/environment/climate-refuge-cities-us-midwest> ] Soaring housing prices are fueling gentrification in Ypsilanti, impacting BIPOC and working-class communities first and worst in terms of housing affordability and land access. Agriculture is a strategy that marginalized communities have long used to weather all manners of hardship, and there is growing evidence that small-scale agriculture is particularly essential in terms of building resilience to climate change. [See, for example: <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315849256-32/urban-peri-urban-agriculture-john-connors-corrie-griffith-camille-nolasco-bolanle-wahab-frank-mugagga?context=ubx&refId=52b70cf6-7bc8-437b-80b8-689f582f1cb6> ]

However, much of the small-scale agriculture in Ypsilanti takes place in backyards, abandoned lots or otherwise marginal land that has traditionally not had a high commercial value. Access to this type of land is threatened by increasing property values. At this time in history when access to land and the knowledge of how to grow food is once again becoming increasingly important for survival, the breaking up of BIPOC and working-class communities in Ypsilanti presents a perfect storm.

This project builds on Finn Bell’s community-based dissertation research, which explored how marginalized agrarian traditions contribute to climate resilience. In collaboration with community partners, Bell examined the use of food cultivation to strengthen community resilience. Through interviews with 20 BIPOC and working-class farmers and gardeners, Bell found that “growing food within marginalized communities is not only of material help in collectively surviving climate change but also important to cultural revitalization that ties people to the ways that their ancestors survived similarly epochal changes.” However, climate-induced gentrification threatens people’s ability to grow food.

This research is impactful, but the farmers’ and gardeners’ stories were filtered through Bell’s white, middle class lens and primarily disseminated within traditional academic spaces, which is why the development of a public oral history project was needed. Oral traditions are essential ways of passing down traditional knowledge. Omer Jean Winborn, project advisor, narrator and interviewer, emphasizes: “We must tell our own stories. No one can tell our stories like we can. As African American people, many of our stories have been told by someone else, told incorrectly, or maybe not at all.” This ethos underscores the project's commitment to providing a platform for communities to share their narratives on their own terms.

Community engagement has been central throughout the project’s development. In summer 2023, Bell and research assistant Briana Hurt presented the findings from the dissertation research to farmers and gardeners. The group decided to go forward with an oral history project and that YDL would be its best home, as people experienced YDL as accessible and of the community. At the summer 2023 meeting, the farmers and gardeners collectively decided: (1) who do we interview? (2) what do we want to know about? (3) what questions should we

ask? and (4) what impact do we want to have? Community members also had the idea of including a portrait photograph of each narrator taken in their farm, garden or home so that they are embodied and contextualized.

At the end of the meeting, people suggested meeting again in the fall for a “Harvest Potluck,” where again stakeholders considered similar questions about who to interview, what to ask and the desired impact. At this meeting, community members also voted to change the name of the project from “Ypsi Food Growers Oral History Project” to “Ypsi Farmers & Gardeners Oral History Project,” after someone brought up that no one self-identifies as a *food grower*. Bell and Hurt compiled and thematically organized all of the community input and used that information to create a recruitment list, the template interview guide and the overall project goals.

So far, the oral histories of six elder farmers and gardeners are available on the public website. Although each interview guide is tailored to the narrator, examples of questions we ask include: “What’s your earliest memory of growing food? What impact has growing food had on your family and community? What would you like people who come after you, either your direct descendants or even people who are just listening to this in the future, to learn from your growing experiences?” The narrators shared powerful stories from their lives and their hopes for the future.

Linda Mealing, who leads a community garden and intergenerational gardening program in the West Willow neighborhood, said:

“One of the basic things of [growing food] is the hope that you have in it. You don't expect to go out there day after day trying to get your vegetables to grow and stuff without an expectation. And to see it come alive as it's growing, to know that I planted it right. I followed the seed directions. Did I give it enough water? Did I make sure it got sun and all that? To become a part of it from the beginning to the end, I enjoy seeing that and I think the young people too...see, ‘Hey, I didn't think I could do this but look what I did.’ And it connects them. That was one thing [people] said, ‘Well, what do you expect [of] your young people, the people that come to be a part of the garden?’ I said, ‘I hope they learn to love it like I did. And of its importance.’”

These oral histories directly accomplish the community-identified goals of the project: (1) to document rich stories and histories that are often ignored, (2) to remember what was possible in the past to help sustain our dreams for what’s next. The project also builds capacity to meet the other community-identified goals: (3) to increase food sovereignty for marginalized communities in Ypsilanti and (4) to be able to provide for ourselves and sustain our community.

Looking ahead, the project is convening a Community Advisory Board (CAB) to deepen participation and transparency. While oral histories are often positioned as a more ethical form of historical documentation, oral history work must be conducted intentionally and carefully to avoid causing harm to narrators, especially given the history of exploitation in the portrayal and dissemination of stories about BIPOC and working-class communities.

In the first round of interviews, we involved narrators every step of the way and integrated elements of ethical oral history practice from the Oral History Association into standard project procedures. While we prioritized the desires and involvement of BIPOC and working-class residents, the creation of a collective body that can hold the project team accountable will deepen existing community engagement and act as an additional safeguard against harm and means of transparency. Further, the creation of the CAB will provide a formal arrangement for more community members to be fully compensated for the time and invaluable insights they contribute toward the project.

The CAB's primary responsibilities are helping the research team shape the next steps of the project, facilitating new relationships and engagement with previously unconnected communities and conducting a participatory evaluation. Going forward, the project will particularly prioritize connecting with Indigenous farmers and gardeners who are interested in narrating oral histories. Doing this work intentionally is especially necessary because of the ways oral history has been used exploitatively with Indigenous communities.

As the project progresses, we will continue to prioritize community leadership and narrative agency, fostering resilience and solidarity through the shared wisdom of Ypsilanti's farmers and gardeners. Throughout the process of building the project, several key lessons have emerged, guiding both the project's trajectory and offering insights for similar community-driven initiatives:

### **The Importance of Narrative Agency**

Providing an opportunity for narrators to express themselves in their own voices and on their own terms ensures the accuracy and impact of their stories. To this point, Winborn says, "Remember, it's an interview, not an interrogation" and emphasizes the importance of not interrupting narrators. Each narrator also reviewed the transcript to make any corrections and ensure that they were comfortable with everything that they shared. With Hurt, each narrator also co-wrote their own biography for inclusion on the website.

### **Adapting to Community Needs**

Flexibility and adaptability in responding to community needs is essential. Since the beginning, the research team saw inclusion of Indigenous farmers and gardeners as important. However, when an Indigenous CAB member pointed out that "removal was very effective," it became clear that the geographic boundaries of the project were prohibitive for Indigenous farmers' and gardeners' participation in the project. Moving forward, the catchment area is expanding in a concerted effort to be more inclusive to Indigenous communities.

### **The Role of Libraries as Community Anchor**

This project highlights the crucial role of public libraries as community anchors and repositories of knowledge. In housing the oral history project, YDL provides an accessible, community-centered platform that confirms the library's role in supporting civic engagement and education. As many historians deeply understand, libraries continue to serve as vital hubs for resource access, especially for underserved populations, offering a space for community gatherings, historical preservation and cultural exchange.

### **Planning for Continuity**

Finally, planning for continuity is essential to ensure long-term benefit to the community. The project aims to create a lasting impact by not only documenting and disseminating these stories but also ensuring that they remain publicly available in perpetuity. Further, conducting a participatory evaluation and publicly disseminating the results in a plain language report ensures that the project is meeting its goals and can be used as a model for other projects. All in all, this project should continue to honor the wisdom passed down by elders and the ancestors to benefit future generations, contributing to broader dialogues on cultural transmission, climate adaptation and land justice.

For more information about the Ypsi Farmers & Gardeners Oral History Project, please contact Finn Bell at [fmcbell@umich.edu](mailto:fmcbell@umich.edu)



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