

INTRODUCTION

Western Michigan University Libraries commits to stewarding and providing access to cultural heritage materials depicting the rich history and diverse communities of Southwest Michigan through their Archives & Regional History Collections and robust digital collections. In support of this mission, WMU Librarians Swierenga and Bocko have developed partnerships with local organizations and cultural heritage institutions to establish digital pathways for sharing their communities' stories and materials with a national audience.

Kalamazoo is home to a very active Public History Roundtable; librarians, archivists, museum professionals, and historians connect monthly to share information and resources about SW Michigan's cultural heritage landscape. The initial contact with **Kalamazoo Valley Museum (KVM)** grew from this connection, and gave way to a collaboration to help KVM provide access to their collections of regional oral histories from past exhibits.

One such exhibit included oral histories from Jewish resort owners in South Haven, Michigan, recorded on VHS in 1995. KVM had previously digitized the VHS for preservation reasons, but did not have a method to provide access to the videos. Utilizing WMU's institutional repository to host the digitized video recordings and description, open access would be given to the interviews.

WORKFLOW

A simple workflow was developed where KVM identified materials and transferred copies of the files to WMU. Materials included video files, transcripts, release forms, photographs, and any relevant accompanying documentation. A collection was created on the **Digital Commons platform (ScholarWorks @ WMU)**, with a title, visuals and description provided by KVM. Video files were reformatted, edited, and loaded into ScholarWorks, along with transcripts and descriptive metadata.

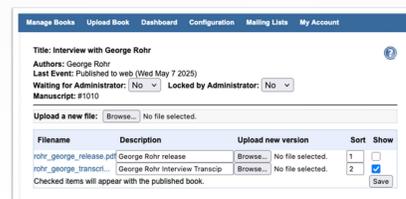
VIDEO EDITING TOOLKIT

All video reformatting/editing was done through open-source and easily-accessible video editing software. Using **HandBrake**, the transferred videos were reformatted to MP4's, a universally accessible filetype that is the preferred upload for Digital Commons.

The editing needs for the South Haven video files were very minimal. **Quicktime** was used for slight trimming or combining videos. For PC Users, **Windows Media Player** or **VLC Media Player** will serve the same function. Once formatted and edited, the videos are uploaded to WMU's ScholarWorks.

"PACKAGING" DIGITAL FILES

In addition to uploading publicly-available videos and transcripts, WMU also uploaded release forms and documentation for internal use and viewing only.



This grouping of public and private files on one item record was helpful not only for record-keeping and streamlining file management for WMU Libraries, but these "packages" of digital records are useful for any future system migrations, file transfers, and preservation.



THE SOUTH HAVEN JEWISH RESORT ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

This project is a dedicated initiative aimed at preserving the vibrant history of the Jewish resorts in South Haven, Michigan. Known for its picturesque beaches and welcoming atmosphere, South Haven became a cherished vacation destination for Jewish families from the early 20th century through the mid-1970s. This project captured and documented the personal stories, experiences, and memories of those who worked at or owned Jewish resorts in South Haven.

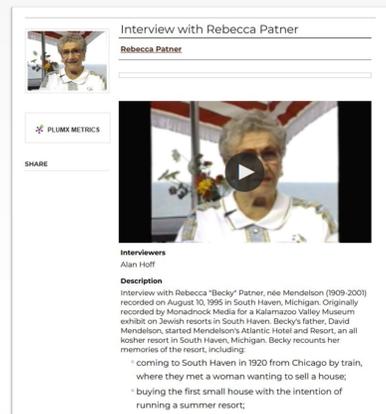
DESCRIPTIVE METADATA

Critical information about the original oral history project and resulting exhibit was contained within scanned documents provided by KVM. A schedule provided the exact dates, times, and locations of each interview. Permission forms provided names of interviewees and the interviewer. Supplemental materials were consulted to add more biographical and historical information, including "South Haven's Jewish Resort Era" by Bea Straus.

Descriptive metadata called out specific themes, events, and names mentioned within the interview, giving viewers a better idea of what to expect within the long recordings and full transcripts.

Special attention was given to the names and dates of the interviewees. In the original exhibit, a person's shortened name was used, or married surnames. The Metadata Librarian conducted additional research, consulting vital records and obituaries, to complete a fuller picture of interviewees' biographical data.

For example, **Rebecca Patner** was interviewed about her experience growing up at Mendelson's Atlantic Hotel & Resort which was owned by her family. She was often referred to as "Becky" by other interviewees. It was important to reflect her full name, nickname, maiden name, and birth/death dates in the description: **Rebecca "Becky" Patner, née Mendelson (1909-2001)**. This gave additional research value to the description, as well as fully differentiating the interviewee.



This small documentary featured clips from the oral histories and footage from the film crew's trip to South Haven in 1994.

Kalamazoo Valley Museum provided the description along with images for a banner.

PROMOTION & VISIBILITY

The South Haven Jewish Resort Oral History Project was harvested and aggregated into **Michigan Memories** and the **Digital Public Library of America (DPLA)**, increasing the discoverability online.

Promotion by WMU Libraries and KVM also brought visibility. Digital files will be preserved through KVM/WMU's membership in the Michigan Digital Preservation Network (MDPN).



NEXT STEPS & ESTABLISHING BEST PRACTICES

Two new collections of oral histories have been identified by KVM: **The Gibson Guitar Company** oral histories; and **Voices for Social Justice**.

The partnership with KVM has been helpful in determining how we can extend this model to additional community partners. While each collaboration is unique, this list of best practices sets a baseline for a successful project:

- Create a **digital file transfer workflow** for easy transferring of files
- Have originating organization provide a **simple inventory** of all files being transferred
- Have PDFs of original **signed release documents**
- Encourage the sharing of **planning documents** about the original project
- Have originating organization write the **collection name** and **brief description** of the project for use in the online collection

LINKS & REFERENCES

Kalamazoo Valley Museum - The South Haven Jewish Resort Oral History Project. ScholarWorks @ WMU. <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/south-haven-resorts>

Kincaid, C. (2024, August 1) Fidelman's Resort: Eighty Acres of Instant Happiness. Kalamazoo Valley Museum Blog. <https://kalamazoomuseum.org/blog/fidelmans-resort-eighty-acres-of-instant-happiness>

Straus, B. (1994) South Haven's Jewish Resort Era: Its Pioneers, Builders & Vacationers. *Michigan Jewish History*, 35(Winter), pages 20-25. https://www.ihsmichigan.org/assets/docs/Journals/Michigan_Jewish_History_1994_12.pdf