

A large, white, multi-decked showboat with a red lower deck is docked on a river. The boat has an American flag on its upper deck. In the background, there are green trees and a blue sky with white clouds. The water is calm and reflects the sky and the boat.

# Kutsche Chronicle

The Kutsche Office of Local History  
is part of Brooks College of Interdisciplinary  
Studies at Grand Valley State University

Fall 2021

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## Upcoming Events

**Oct 29, 2021 @ 10:30 am / The Restoration Boom**  
Preservation and change in 1980s Grand Rapids. Live Zoom webinar.

**Dec 3, 2021 @ 10:30 am / NAGPRA in the '90s**  
A live Zoom panel discussion on the local impact of 1990's Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

# Director's Report

Fall is a great time for new beginnings! At least it always seems so to me, even though the bounty of summer is wilting, growth can take place in other areas of life. Thus, it seems an apt time for me to introduce myself as the new Director of the Kutsche Office. I'm so very thrilled to be able to continue the Kutsche Office's mission of bringing diverse communities to the fore through history.



*Francisco and Zandra Vasquez at Golden Hart Farms, 1987. Donated by the Vasquez family for the Growing Community Project.*

For those of you who don't know me, I have been a faculty member in the History Department here at GVSU since 2014. My academic research focuses primarily on the history of Latinos in Michigan, especially the 1960s and 1970s. I first worked with the Kutsche Office under the leadership of Dr. Melanie Shell-Weiss on the Growing Community Project in Oceana County. That project, like so many others that the Kutsche Office has done, really spoke to my decades long commitment to helping diverse communities claim their place in Michigan's history.

This past spring I was fortunate to discuss Kutsche Office operations and this leadership transition with outgoing Director Kim McKee. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. McKee for her years of service and especially for her successful pivot to virtual programming after the pandemic began in March, 2020. For the time being, we are continuing with virtual programming. Be sure to note the upcoming live webinars in the Grand Rapids Time Traveler series elsewhere in the Chronicle.

Lastly, I want to make sure we don't miss the opportunity to work with you or your organization during this time. Even though we won't be able to gather a crowd for an event this fall, I would love to meet you one-on one, either in person or on Zoom. It would be great for me to learn more about your work and discuss how the Kutsche Office can collaborate with you. I look forward to hearing from you soon, either virtually or in person, so we can discuss our West Michigan history.



# Completing the Circle: The Teaching West Michigan History Project

Creating new historical knowledge is a cyclical process. At the Kutsche Office, we engage in various parts of this cycle, and partnerships with local organizations and community members are critical to our success in these processes. This year, we have begun a new project to further the distribution of local history research, called the Teaching West Michigan Histories Project (TWMH). This project will make the local history of under-represented populations more accessible to K-12 educators.

Since its inception, the Kutsche Office has conducted many projects in partnership with community organizations. Through the diligence of past Kutsche staff, local history organizations, university library supporters, students, and volunteers, much of this research is now available through the GVSU library digital collections. For example, you can [listen to interviews with Oceana county farmers and farmworkers](#) collected in 2016 as a part of the Growing Community Project or [view photographs of past summers in Saugatuck-Douglas](#) going back more than a century. Digitizing these materials and making them available through the library website was an important, and time consuming, step in distributing the histories we helped collect.

TWMH seeks to further enhance the accessibility of these materials and introduce local history lessons at earlier ages. We will identify materials previously collected by the Kutsche Office and our partners that can be used to create new K-12 classroom materials. For example, materials collected about farm workers in Oceana County could be used to teach high school students about post-WWII demographic changes, migration, and immigration.

Our first step is to identify resources that already exist for classroom use. We have begun work on a database of lesson plans, curricular materials, and classroom-ready resources currently in use.

**If you know of any such materials in use by your organization that you would like to share** please do let us know! In addition, we are looking for **teachers and other educators to partner with us** on this project. If you are interested in integrating the local history of diverse groups into your teaching we would love to hear from you.

## Welcome Rebekkah Bowen



Rebekkah Bowen is our new Teaching West Michigan Histories research assistant. Rebekkah is a senior double-majoring in History and Political Science. She recently became interested in pursuing a career in public history, and hopes to attend graduate school in a public humanities program. Before moving on to graduate school, Rebekkah first plans to join AmeriCorps to gain experience in the non-profit sector. She is excited to be working with the Kutsche Office assisting in educating K-12 students in West Michigan History.

# Lisa Plank: 2021 Gordon Olson Award winner

The Kutsche Office of Local History at Grand Valley State University is pleased to announce Lisa Plank as our 2021 Gordon Olson Award winner. Most will know the Grand Rapids native as the Executive Director of the Lowell Area Historical Museum, the latest in a long career of bringing history out to the public in West Michigan.

Plank excels at developing partnerships to share West Michigan's diverse histories in a multitude of formats, from digitized collections to FM radio broadcasts to fostering the region's next generation of public historians through student collaborations.



Our nomination committee was also impressed with how Plank's work acknowledges that local history is just as complex, critical, and contested as the present. Her frank incorporation of blackface on the *Lowell Showboat* and incorporation of Indigenous stories into the town's history provides a model for other small local history institutions looking to share their own stories.

**Stay tuned for our digital video release honoring Lisa Plank's work!**

## The Restoration Boom

The 1980s kicked off a transformation and revitalization of downtown Grand Rapids, motivating historic building restoration and inspiring new construction. This changed the city's landscape and helped restore many older buildings to their historic state. Pamela VanderPloeg, architectural historian, educator, and administrator of [ArchitectureGrandRapids.org](http://ArchitectureGrandRapids.org), will present her original research for this live Zoom webinar.

**Friday, Oct 29 at 10:30 am**  
**Register at: [gvsu.edu/s/1OC](https://gvsu.edu/s/1OC)**

