

Kutsche Chronicle

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

Winter 2026



An aerial photograph looking north towards Muskegon Lake
and Downtown Muskegon, May 30, 1987.

Image credit: Lakeshore Museum Center Digital Collections, Muskegon, MI

2025-2026 Kutsche Intern Profiles

The Kutsche Office is sponsoring eight GVSU students in local history internships across the greater Grand Rapids area during the 2025-26 academic year. These students have gained valuable experience helping local communities and organizations to understand and preserve local history. The Kutsche Office is proud to help bring the next generation of local history buffs into the pipeline.

Brooke Stewart

Brooke Stewart is a senior at GVSU majoring in Group Social Studies and Secondary Education. Brooke works on our Teaching West Michigan History project, the goal of which is to create meaningful lesson plans that teach about the history of diverse communities in West Michigan. To students interested in working for the Kutsche Office, Brooke said, "Be open to learning new things, especially about communities and histories you may not be familiar with. Overall, the Kutsche Office is a supportive environment where you can build real skills, explore local history in depth, and make a positive impact through the work you create."



Anthony Clark

Anthony Clark is a senior majoring in Group Social Studies and Secondary Education. Anthony works on our Teaching West Michigan History Project. During this project, Anthony has reinforced the skills he has learned in his major by creating lesson plans before his student teaching experience. Anthony believes that studying local history can provide students with a more personal experience when learning about historical narratives and the factors that shaped their local communities into what they are today. Anthony shared, "Researching local history has shown me the value in learning about the communities directly around us and how those stories matter."



2025-2026 Kutsche Intern Profiles

Melanie Avila

Melanie Avila is a junior at GVSU double majoring in Pre-K through 6th Grade Education and Educational Studies. Melanie works with Dr. Leanne Kang on her project, "Community Historians Workshops: Telling the GRPS Story Together," which seeks to explore the history of the Grand Rapids Public Schools. Melanie has enjoyed talking about GRPS history with members of multiple generations of GRPS graduates. She has created connections between this experience and her major, stating, "My experience in this internship connects strongly to my major because I am shaping how I think about identity and teaching, and I am also learning how the history of our city shapes its students and schools."



South High School, now the
Gerald R. Ford Job Corps Center
Grand Rapids, MI

Ella McCully

Ella is a junior from Hudson, Illinois who is studying Secondary English and History Education. She is interested in learning more about the process of historical writing and publishing. Outside of school and work, Ella enjoys reading, being on the Grand Valley Dance Troupe, and going to concerts and hockey games. Ella also took part in GV's Writing in Action program in Scotland this past summer.



The "Community Historians" and "Letters Home" projects are funded by the Kutsche Office's Community Collaboration Grant: gvsu.edu/kutsche/ccg

For more on Galilea Bahena's work as an intern at the West Michigan Hispanic Chamber of Commerce check out this article from Rapid Growth Media:

<https://tinyurl.com/galileabahena>

We also have sponsored the internships of Jada Dobbins, a Global Studies and Social Impact major at the Grand Rapids African American Museum and Archives as well as Shayna Haynes Heard, a M.A. student in the College of Education & Community Innovation and Victoria Williams, an Allied Health Sciences major at the Grand Rapids Media & Film Incubator. Stay tuned for more media coverage of these interns soon in GVNext <https://www.gvsu.edu/gvnext>

Thank You For Your Support

Supporting the Kutsche Office of Local History advances Dr. Paul Kutsche's vision of using history to give voice to diverse communities. As a bridge between academic and public history, we help amplify West Michigan stories while fostering the next generation of local historians.

In the past year, backing from our generous donors allowed us to provide invigorating, enriching and well-compensated local history internships for students like Brooke, Anthony, Melanie, and Ella. In fact, every \$180 donated funds one week of a student's internship. Patrons also help fund our Local History Roundtable and our collaborations with local history organizations in Grand Rapids and Holland. In the coming year, we will continue to provide superb local history programming.

Donate today at
gvsu.edu/kutsche/donate

2025 Gordon Olson Award

Would you like to help recognize an individual making especially creative, valuable, or thought-provoking contributions to our understanding of local history? Consider nominating them for the Kutsche Office of Local History's 2025 Gordon Olson Award.

The Gordon Olson Award recognizes individuals whose work embodies the Kutsche Office's mission of "using history to give voice to diverse communities." We celebrate those who help facilitate our understanding of the past and those who are documenting history as it happens in the present. Nominations are open to anyone, from historians, librarians, and genealogists, to journalists, artists, and community organizers.



Submit your nomination by February 16th, 2026 at gvsu.edu/kutsche/go

Letters Home Project

The Kutsche Office has awarded Dr. Annie Whitlock the Community Collaboration Grant for Fall 2025.

Dr. Whitlock and her community partners will receive over \$13,000 to support *Letters Home: A West Michigan Community's Experience in World War II*. *Letters Home* is a podcast about Dr. Whitlock's grandfather, Bruce McMahon, who served as a B-17 pilot during World War II. Dr. Whitlock hosts the podcast with Dale Kropf, Mitch McMahon, and Laurie Summerfield. The podcast can be accessed below at: <https://tinyurl.com/lettershomepodcast>



Hosts of the *Letters Home* podcast

Teaching West Michigan History Project

This semester, the Teaching West Michigan History Project team have been working on creating educational materials about the history of Mexican and Mexican American migrants in Ottawa County.

This lesson will encourage students to look at major historical events from a local perspective and will connect them to the events and people that shaped their local community.

Are you a secondary education educator or know of any educators in Ottawa County or Grand Rapids who would be interested in receiving high quality lesson plans with a focus on local history? Contact the Kutsche Office at kutsche@gvsu.edu or 616-331-8099!



Class at the Olive center town hall in Olive Center, MI 1950.

Image credit: Holland Museum Collections

Community Historians Workshops Report

By Dr. Leanne Kang

This fall, in coordination with our community partners at the Grand Rapids African American Museum and Archives, The Grand Rapids People's History Project, the SECOM Resource Center, and the Urban Core Collective, we hosted three workshops, each centered on a specific decade: the 1960s–1970s, the 1970s, and the 1980s. From our very first workshop, we were joined by several South High and Ottawa High graduates.

These graduates' combined perspectives highlighted how varied their experiences were across South High and Ottawa in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Black Union High graduates who were bused to Union High reported that it was a devastating experience due to significant racial hostility, which endured for years. By contrast, Ottawa High graduates recalled more positive memories from around the same period as the school became more racially mixed and school activities created opportunities to form interracial connections.

Later workshops revealed how continued busing and shifting racial demographics across Grand Rapids were reshaping school communities and altering the racial makeup of GRPS over time.

The workshops revealed a community story that urges us to keep questioning what busing ultimately produced. Busing fell short of its goal of social integration, and instead left long-lasting marks on the city's social and cultural landscape. Black families were displaced, White families left the district, and by the 1980s GRPS was facing deep financial strain. Fifty years later, the result is stark: GRPS is now a majority-minority district within a city that is still majority White.

The series will continue in 2026 with three additional workshops focused on the 1990s, the 2000s to the present, and a final culminating session.

Don't Miss: Community Historians at History Detectives 2026

Dr. Kang will discuss her work uncovering the history of Grand Rapids Public Schools. Come learn more about this and other local history projects!



History Detectives

January 17, 2026

10am to 3:15pm

Grand Rapids Public Library
Ryerson Auditorium

historydetectivesgr.org



“Uncovering Grand
Rapids Public Schools as
a Community”

Leanne Kang

10:00am

17th Annual Local History Roundtable

March 18, 2026

GVSU DeVos Center

401 West Fulton, Grand Rapids

2:30 - 3:00 • Registration

3:00 - 3:30 • Opening remarks and Gordon Olson Award

3:30 - 5:00 • Panel on the Women's Resource Center

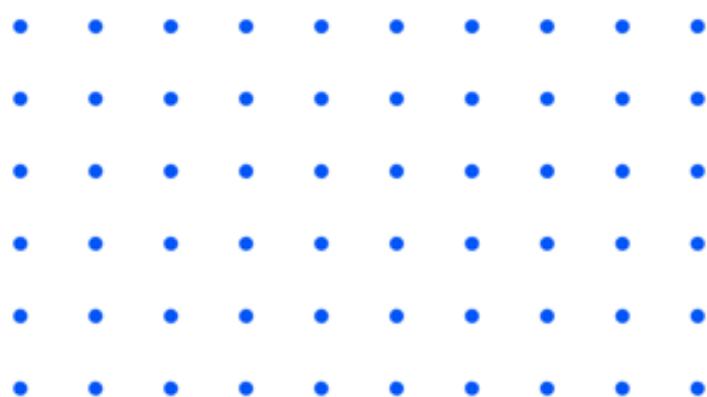
5:00 - 6:00 • Dinner for registered guests

6:00 - 8:00 • Keynote presentation and Q and A session

Keynote address:

Influencing 1776

How the Great Lakes Anishnaabek
Helped Shape American History



Keynote address by

Eric Hemenway



**GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY**
KUTSCHE OFFICE OF
LOCAL HISTORY