



AMPLIFYING DIVERSE VOICES:

Documenting the History of Underrepresented Communities at The University of Akron

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The
University
of Akron

150
SESQUICENTENNIAL
1870 2020



BACKGROUND

The University of Akron

- Founded as Buchtel College in 1870
- Went through three major transitions/eras
- 19,200 students
- Metropolitan campus with more than 80 buildings and 4 regional campuses
- Numerous academic programs, many nationally ranked
- Known for law, engineering, and polymer science programs



BACKGROUND

Archival Services

- Founded as University Archives in 1965
- Renamed Archival Services in 1972
- Mission is to collect, preserve, and provide access to primary and secondary sources that document the history of UA and the region



BACKGROUND

Archival Services

- Consists of University Archives, Special Collections, and Records Management
- 36,000 square foot facility in downtown Akron
- 40,000 cubic feet of materials, including 12,000 cubic feet of University Archives materials
- 4,500 inquiries per year



BACKGROUND

UA Sesquicentennial

- Planned for several years in advance
- Had main sesquicentennial committee and several working groups consisting of faculty, staff, administrators, alums and friends of university
- May 31, 2020 was kickoff for Sesquicentennial year
- Celebrated for one full year (celebration just ended on 5/31/21)



BACKGROUND

UA Sesquicentennial

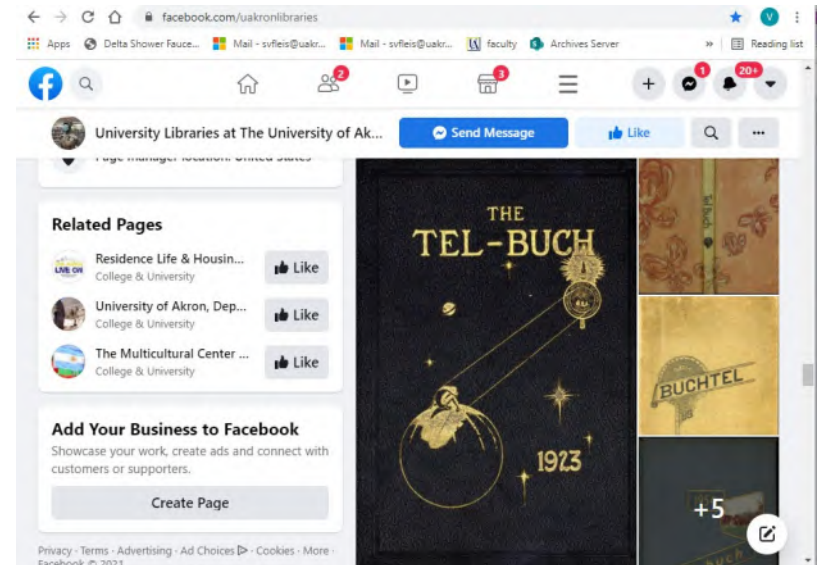
- Included numerous celebrations and projects:
 - Sesquicentennial Book
 - 150th Website (www.uakron.edu/150)
 - Campus banners and murals
 - 6 episode docu-series on UA history
 - Virtual gathering/toast on 10/10/20 (in lieu of Sesquicentennial Gala)
 - Celebration of Academic Excellence/Parade of Colleges



SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Archival Services

- Projects by archives:
 - Social Media Posts on UA History
 - Book/Website
 - Oral History Project
 - Online Exhibits
 - Digitization Projects
 - Processing/Preservation Projects
- All projects incorporated a component of amplifying diverse voices
- Important to the archives and the libraries, especially after death of George Floyd and BLM and anti-Asian violence



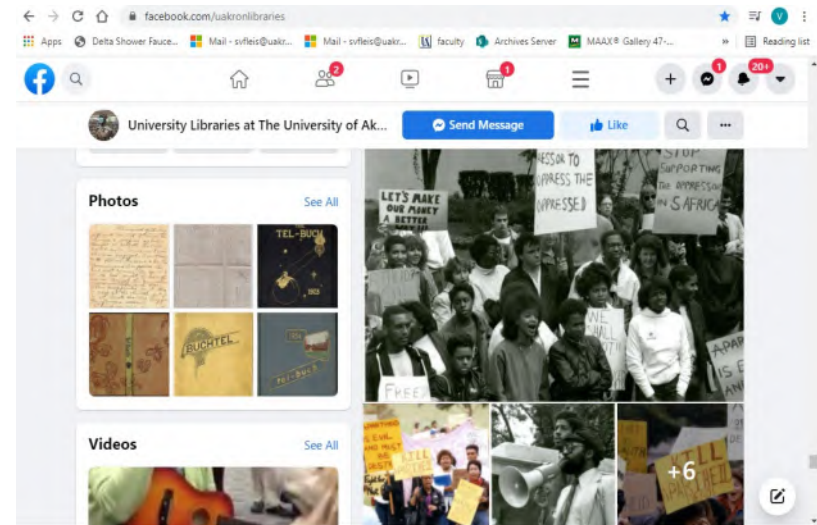
SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Social Media Posts

- Series of social media posts on UA and UL Facebook Pages

(www.facebook.com/uakronlibraries):

- This Day in University History
- Diary Entries from Buchtel College Students
- Letters from Buchtel College Students
- Posts for Women's History Month and Black History Month
- Social Justice Posts



SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Book & Website of Memories

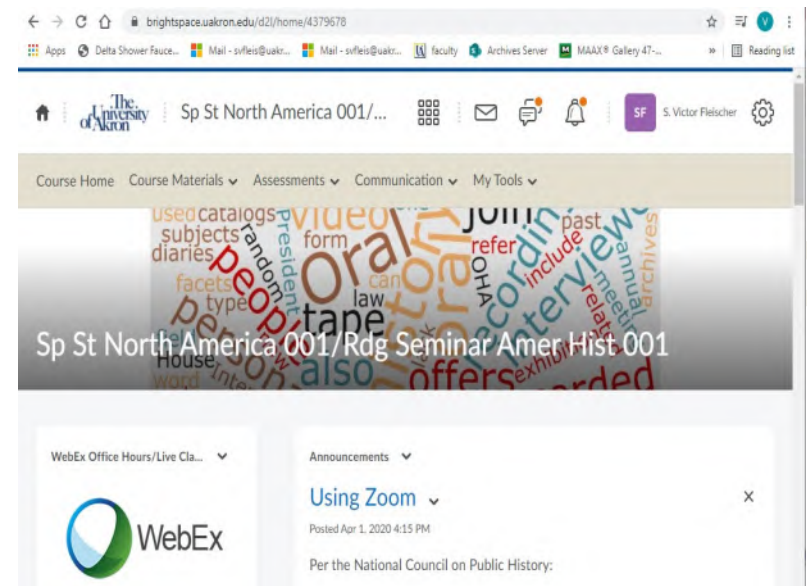
- Sesquicentennial book *Hail We Akron!: The Third Fifty Years of The University of Akron, 1970-2020*
- Crowdsourced book of memories
- Companion website (www.uakron.edu/hail) in BePress/IdeaExchange
- Included “diverse voices” on the committee and stories in the book and on the website
- Not all stories positive
- Led to concerns about oral histories



SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Oral Histories

- Idea was to capture university history and start an oral history collection on UA history
- Way to involve students in the sesquicentennial
- Looked at what was missing from historical record and decided to focus on inclusion and diversity
- Collaborated with history professor and team taught oral history class



SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Oral Histories

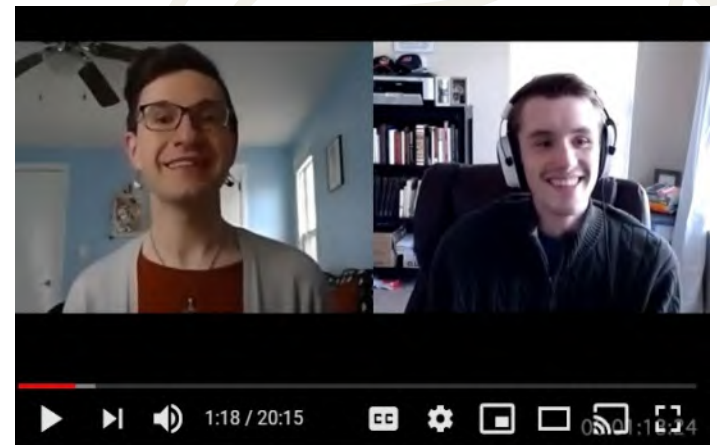
- Focused on underrepresented or marginalized communities:
 - African-Americans
 - Women
 - LGBTQ+ community
 - People with disabilities
- Interviewed current and former:
 - Students
 - Faculty
 - Staff
 - Administrators



SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Oral Histories

- Due to stories collected for book, administration had concerns about the topic of the oral histories
- Concern regarding negative PR due to recent budget problems and past administration
- Concern stories wouldn't be positive, and many of them weren't (stories racism, sexism, lack of facilities for people with disabilities, etc.)
- But we had obligation as historians and archivists to capture and tell these stories



SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Oral Histories

- We had concern about stories that painted university in a negative light, especially with recent layoffs and budget cuts due to pandemic
- However, BLM resurgence and renewed calls for social justice and racial equality confirmed importance of project and made it even more crucial and timely
- Helped by new president and initiatives that support social justice and racial equality.
- Received awards and recognition



Message from President Gary L. Miller

Memo to campus endorsing the Social Justice Task Force's report and defining next steps

Dear Colleagues,

I invite you to review [the final report lower on this page](#) of The University of Akron Social Justice Task Force, which I appointed on July 2020. This report includes an excellent assessment of our current position with respect to diversity, equity and inclusion and contains many strong recommendations for advancing our procedures and practices in this area.

The next step is to thoroughly examine the recommendations of the task force and develop actions to move the University forward. The Cabinet, working in conjunction with the following leadership team composed of the four task force committee chairs, will collaborate on this.

- **Willa E. Gibson**, Associate Dean of the School of Law
- **Suzette L. Speight**, Department of Psychology
- **Michael Strong**, Dean of Students
- **Monica M. Ascar**, School of Social Work, Lakewood Campus

Dr. Wrice (who is a member of the Cabinet) and Dr. Zhao will also be fully involved.

As we communicate our progress, please feel free to contact me, any member of the Cabinet or the other colleagues involved in this with your suggestions or concerns.

Thank you all for your commitment to making UA a model of diversity, equity and inclusion.

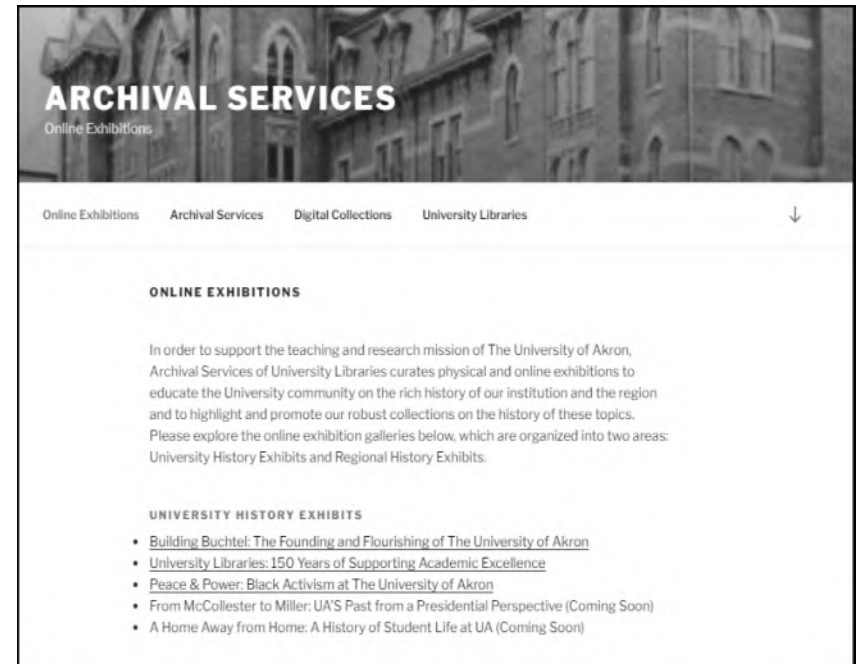
GARY L. MILLER

President, The University of Akron

SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Online Exhibits

- Curated several online exhibits, including one for Black History Month
- Historical Commemoration Working Group suggested it be on Buchtel Hall Takeover by BUS in 1969
- Concerns due to sensitive and controversial subject matter
- Decided to do the exhibit but to put into broader historical context and tie in with current and past calls for social justice and racial equality on campus



SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Online Exhibits

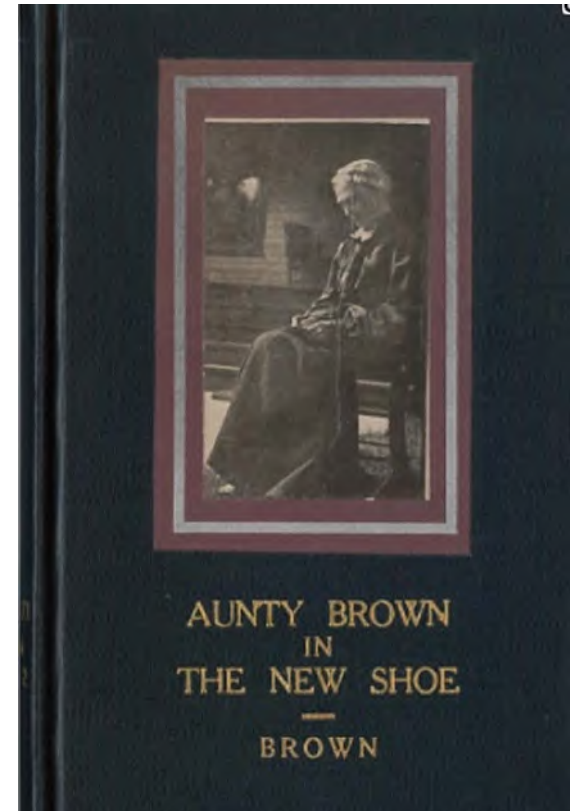
- Titled “Peace & Power: Black Activism at The University of Akron”
- Examines the following topics:
 - Buchtel Hall Takeover of 1969
 - Anti-Apartheid protests on campus in 1986
 - Protests for racial equality in early 1990s after Rodney King incident/L.A. Riots
- Focused on positive outcomes of protests:
 - Creation of Black Studies Program
 - Creation of Black Cultural Center (now Multicultural Center)
 - Creation of Diversity Council
 - Hiring of additional Black faculty/staff



SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Digitization Projects

- Black History Collections
 - Black Cultural Center Oral Histories
 - Photos and documents on BUS Takeover of Buchtel Hall in 1969
- Women's History Collections
 - Books by and about Lucinda W. "Aunty" Brown
 - Charmaine Streharsky Oral Histories on Caroline Pardee



SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Processing Projects

- Black History Collections:
 - Black Cultural Center Records
 - Dr. Shirla R. McClain Collection
- Women's History Collections:
 - Caroline Pardee Papers
 - Dr. Kathleen Endres Collection



SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Lessons Learned/Takeaways

- When collecting and documenting diverse voices collaboration is key
- Seek feedback and input, especially from groups involved
- Take risks and chances
- Don't be afraid of controversy



SESQUICENTENNIAL PROJECTS

Lessons Learned/Takeaways

- However, have a plan/know what to say if questioned by administration/board
- Its our job as archivists and historians to ensure that our collections are as diverse and inclusive as possible, that they document and are a broad representation of the diverse student body and communities we serve, and that we document ALL voices and fill gaps or voids in our collections
- And anniversaries are an opportune time to do just that!

QUESTIONS?

