

**Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board  
Final Grant Report - January 20, 2022**

**Organization:** Oberlin Heritage Center (legal: Oberlin Historical and Improvement Organization)

**Project Title:** Digitizing OHC's VHS Collection

**Project Director:** Liz Schultz, (440) 774-1700, director@oberlinheritage.org

**Summary of Project Activities and Accomplishments**

The Oberlin Heritage Center proposed to digitize, preserve, and share its collection of approximately 120 VHS tapes and mini tapes, dating from 1994 through 2005, using the services of a professional digitization vendor. The bulk of digitization was finished by November 2021 and was followed by re-checking poor quality videos and the creation of archival master files. The following is a summary of materials digitized. For a full list, see the attached document "OHC Tape Inventory With Transcription Notes" (which is a working document).

- 73 "Conversations with Lothrop" tapes (35-45 minute community interviews)
- 8 miscellaneous community episode tapes ("Oberlin Today," "Who's Next Door," "Round Table on Energy")
- 43 OHC tapes or OHC-held tapes (annual meetings, public programs, historic preservation commission meetings, bell tower construction footage, filmed oral history story circles, etc.)

We had intended to be done with the project by the end of 2021 but were not able to meet that deadline due to several factors: 1) We had to find a new vendor after our proposed vendor failed to return our messages after we received the grant. 2) Our human resources, including volunteers and interns doing the bulk of the video descriptions, have been stretched thin this entire year. 3) We hit a chicken-and-egg situation near the end of the project of wanting to seek approval from interview participants before making the videos public online, but we knew they would want to preview their videos before granting permission, which could not happen until after digitization and editing. All the pieces started coming together in December and will continue to be addressed over the winter of 2022. That said, we still believe the primary goal of this project – to save the content of these tapes and make it easier to share it with members of the public – was accomplished.

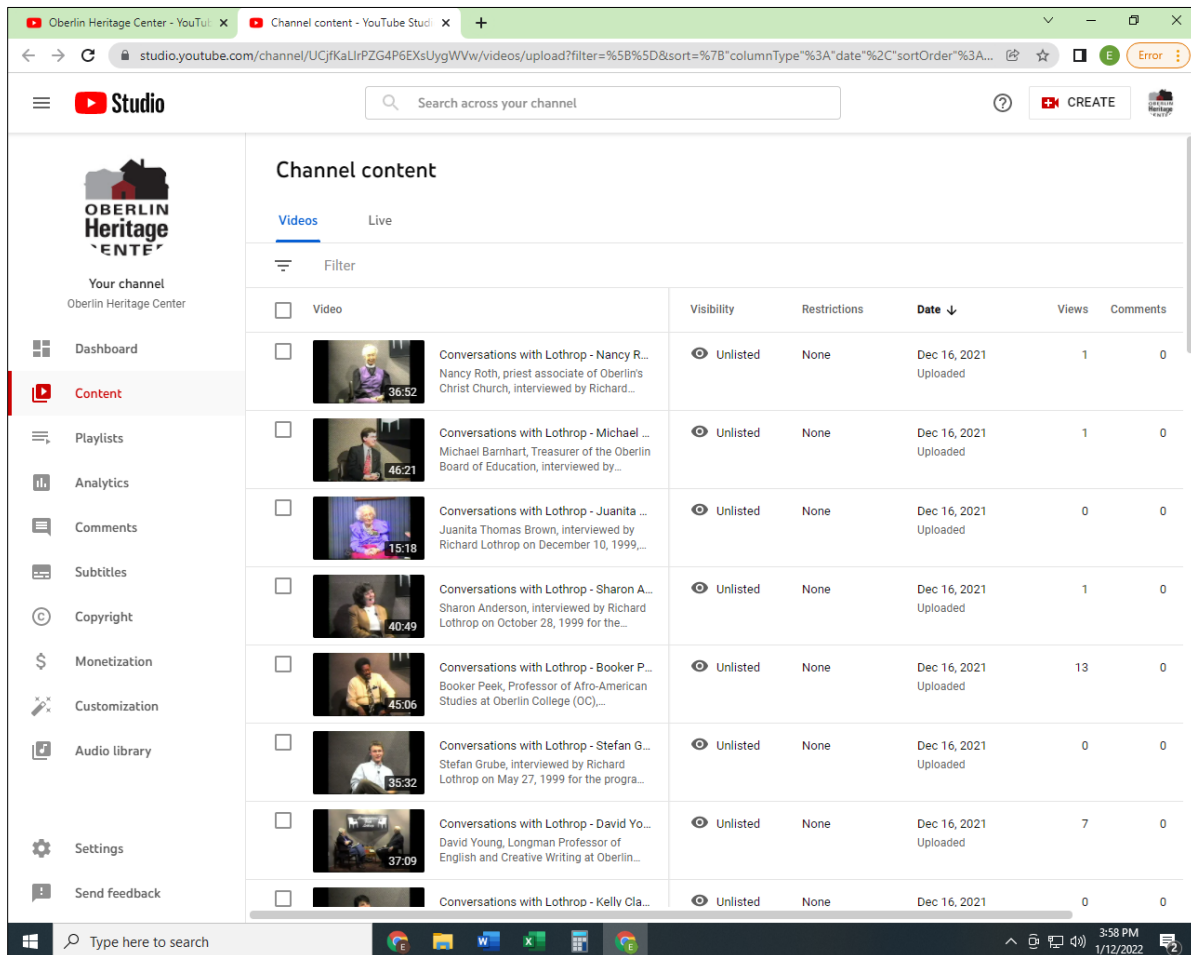
As of January 15, 2022, all of the VHS tapes have been digitized and twenty-two videos have been fully edited and uploaded to YouTube after we received permission from interviewees or family members. Twenty-seven community interviews have yet to be edited, in addition to thirty-three of the institutional recordings of programs and events. We are actively continuing with this editing, permission, and posting process.

You may find the current publicly-available videos here:

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLWsxLXseRKRItumT3MibOTdrhT1Fr7lpb0>

The tapes have since been returned and rehoused in archival boxes and the digital access files are saved on a hard drive, our shared computer, and our ongoing cloud backup. The master files are saved on an external hard drive and our shared computer. We had originally proposed storing master files as JPEG2000 or FFV1 files but, after hours of research and deliberation, decided that neither file type seemed to be widely used or guaranteed to be available years from now, at least for organizations of our size and means. We were also cognizant of the fact that making massive, unwieldy files from low resolution VHS content was not the best use of our storage space. We compromised and selected Apple ProRes 422 HQ master files that we feel are more likely to be accessible to us in the future while keeping a high-quality file version.

OHC's Collection Manager has begun to address organizational inconsistencies with the way the Lothrop VHS collection was originally cataloged in PastPerfect. These issues will continue to be fixed over the winter and the catalogue records updated as content and condition descriptions are completed for each video file.



Screen Shot of Uploaded, Edited Videos

**Video details**

UNDO CHANGES    SAVE    ⋮

Title (required) ?  
 Conversations with Lothrop - Rob DiSpirito - Interview 2 of 2 (Oberlin, OH)

Description ?  
 Rob DiSpirito, Oberlin City Manager, interviewed by Richard Lothrop on September 26, 1996 for the program Conversations with Lothrop.

Richard Lothrop announces that this is his second interview with Rob DiSpirito, held to focus on issues. DiSpirito summarizes the key roles of city government. He discusses Oberlin's new utility projects, including a 2.1 megawatt electric generator and a televising system for use with sanitary and storm sewers. Concerning infrastructure, DiSpirito describes upcoming repairs to storm water basins and streets. [Break 17:53-19:55] DiSpirito discusses a public survey nearing completion regarding the most favored option for a recreational facility. He describes the state's Rails to Trails bike path project, which will extend Oberlin's bike paths. DiSpirito acknowledges cost considerations concerning recreational improvements. Regarding public safety, DiSpirito describes upcoming live fire exercises to enhance the city's fire and police training, and the need for new fire trucks. He discusses efforts to hire more police and to ramp up the focus on illegal drug use. He lauds public meetings conducted by the police department to enhance communications with the community. DiSpirito discusses work being done to enforce city fire codes, in conjunction with Oberlin College. He discusses plans for economic development that are compatible with Oberlin. DiSpirito describes the process of working with city officials and the public on the annual budget of roughly \$15 million. In closing, DiSpirito invites people to serve on a city board or commission. [52:36] www.oberlinheritagecenter.org Contact the Oberlin Heritage Center for permission inquiries.

DiSpirito's first interview occurred on August 29, 1996.

Thumbnail

Video link  
<https://youtu.be/KgnqJU4IH7w>

Filename  
 19960926-CWL-DiSpirito final.mp4

Video quality  
 SD


Visibility  
 Unlisted

Restrictions  
 None

Subtitles

End screen

Cards



**Screenshot of Behind-the-Scenes YouTube Video Management Page, Including Description**



**Photographs of the Rehoused VHS Tapes**

## **Project Self-Assessment**

This project was extremely successful in its core goal of preserving this content for future generations. There were a few setbacks that were out of our hands, such as the vendor shift and the fact that about a dozen of the tapes had degraded, from which we salvaged what audio or visual content we could. One delay we potentially could have addressed earlier was seeking permission from the interview participants, but, again, we found it easier to explain our intention after we had the videos uploaded to private YouTube links. Given our delays, we decided to focus on getting the “Conversations with Lothrop” interviews ready for public posting first.

Even though the grant project ended in December, we continue to gain permissions and will eventually turn our attention to the institutional tapes, some of which will be posted online and others of which it makes more sense to keep in-house as Resource Center materials. As stated previously, OHC’s Collections Manager will continue updating entries in our PastPerfect collections software as we complete content and condition descriptions now that we have easily viewable files.

We did stay on budget and fully expended the grant funds within the grant period, although the source of the matching funds shifted a bit depending on which staff members or volunteers were available to do various tasks. Additional match hours are happening after December 31 but are not recorded in the Grant Financials report. We appreciated OHRAB being flexible about funding so that we could spend the extra that remained (due to the vendor change) on other project materials, including purchasing archival boxes for the tapes and digital storage.

## **Impact**

The content of the interviews themselves – many concerning various City departments, schools, and nonprofits from 20+ years ago – has already expanded our historical understanding and sparked discussions with related organizations. Besides the preservation of these unique community resources, one of the most valuable parts of this project was connecting with the original interviewees from nearly thirty years ago or, in some cases, their family members. Other people impacted included the people who worked directly on the project, including three college student interns, three volunteers, and four staff members. The volunteers and interns, in particular, valued the opportunity to learn more about the community as they watched the interviews. The interns also gained direct experience with collections storage and digital tools, including database management, video editing, YouTube, and subtitles.

## **Building on the Success**

We expect to continue making new connections with interview participants, their families, and others who are interested in this content as we continue to seek permissions. Once we feel we have done our best to notify participants, we will publicize the project in various ways, including in our digital newsletter and on social media. Depending on the pandemic and the

continued advisability for virtual programs, we may host a virtual watch party for some select interviews. We will continue to credit OHRAB, NHPRC, and NARA in our promotions.

We will also continue the success of this project by turning our attention to other media in our holdings that are nearing obsolescence, such as disks, CDs, and DVDs.

We would also be happy to provide advice and lessons-learned to any other small historical societies and organizations that are contemplating similar projects.

### **Project Expenses**

Please see the accompanying expense report. We greatly appreciated the flexibility granted by OHRAB to adjust our expenses after our proposed vendor fell through.

Award Amount: \$2,582.87

### Grant Funded Expenses

#### Digitization

By far, the greatest expense of the project was the cost of digitization using a professional vendor, Stilson Video Services (\$2,262.78). We did not encounter issues that required additional tape repair fees. Included in that final vendor fee were several flash drives and a large hard drive for delivering the files.

#### Equipment

With funds remaining from the grant, we purchased the following:

Archival VHS storage boxes (\$135.68)

6 TB internal hard drive for our shared computer, for the master file back-up (\$139.99)

SATA cables for hard drive installation (\$18.36)

Headphones for intern and volunteer work while editing files (\$30.99)

Total: \$2,587.80

Actual expenses in excess of the awarded amount (\$4.93) were covered by OHC's general funds.

### Matched Expenses

#### Travel

Travel to and from the vendor (\$98.56).

#### Personnel

This includes staff, volunteer, and intern time spent on the project. (Grant administration, creating an inventory and preferred digital file name list for ourselves and the digitization vendor, preparing the tapes for safe transportation, delivery to vendor, quality review of the

returned files, drafting content descriptions, editing files for public viewing, uploading files to YouTube, seeking permission, creating subtitles, etc.)

Total time spent during the grant period: 193.25 hours. (Excludes vendor time)

Staff hours (60.25) value: \$1,722.76

Intern hours (48.25) value: \$459.38 (OHC is responsible for 25% of federal work study hours)

Volunteer hours (84.75) value: \$2,418.76 (Calculated using Independent Sector's April 2021 value)

Total: \$4,600.91

Matched expenses were funded by OHC's general funds and donations by a community member who is interested in this project and the legacy of Richard Lothrop.

Please note that work is ongoing and this report includes only hours logged in the grant period (ended December 31, 2021). Volunteers did more work than proposed in the grant application, largely due to the delay in the project start and unexpected shifts in student intern schedules.

### **Publicity**

As reported in the interim report, OHC published the project when the grant was first approved (June 2021 newsletter). We anticipate much more publicity when we first announce that videos are available for viewing on our YouTube page, which we hope will be in March of 2022. We will credit supporters as per the OHRAB guidelines, as we do in the introductory slides of every video posted to YouTube.

### **Conclusion**

Although the work is ongoing, we believe this preservation project was a great success and makes these unique recordings widely available to the public for the first time in decades. We are extremely appreciative to the Ohio Historical Records Advisory Board, the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC), and the National Archives and Records Administration.