

Archival Resources on the Web

Assistant Editor: Jolie Braun, Ohio State University.

Contact Jolie at braun.338@osu.edu if you would like to guest author a column or have a good idea to share.

Detroit “Archive” City

By Lauren Lincoln, Archivist, Private Archive

Known as the “Comeback City,” Detroit has consistently risen from the ashes, from the Great Fire of 1805 through white flight in the mid-twentieth century to its emergence from Chapter 9 bankruptcy in 2014. A rich cultural center, the Detroit Metro area is diverse, home to the largest Middle Eastern population, the fifth largest Latino community, and one of the first middle-class African American communities in the United States. Detroit’s institutions are dedicated to preserving the legacy of its art, culture, music, and the history of its inhabitants. In commemoration of this year’s MAC Annual Meeting in Detroit, “Innovation, Transformation, Resurgence,” the following is a portrait of the Motor City’s digital archival resources.

Virtual Motor City

Through photographs from the *Detroit News*, Wayne State University’s **Virtual Motor City collection**, <https://digital.library.wayne.edu/item/wayne:collectionvmc>, reflects Detroit’s political and social history. The website features images of Detroit’s culture, people, and historic events



Woodward Street at Clifford, downtown Detroit

from 1860 to 1980. It highlights important organizations, events, and activist communities in Detroit’s history, including the Black Panther Party, the National Organization for Women, the antinuclear movement, and the city’s antiwar and labor movements. The documentation of cityscapes and historic buildings reveals the materiality of Detroit’s history. At present, only a fraction of the collection is available online, and more than 800,000 negatives and prints can be accessed at the Walter P. Reuther Library.

Detroit 67

The unique and invaluable resource **Detroit 67**, <http://detroit1967.detroithistorical.org>, features a diverse range of perspectives on the Detroit 1967 Rebellion from current and former Detroit residents, political leaders, public servants, and residents born after 1967 reflecting on how the events affected their lives. The collecting of written and oral histories was part of a larger initiative at the Detroit Historical Society, **Detroit 67: Looking Back to Move Forward**, a multiyear project connecting history to the present through an interactive exhibition, local partnerships, and a community-wide mobilization initiative. The oral history archive features interviews with numerous community leaders, including Reverend Wendell Anthony, Edward Deeb, Dr. Karl Gregory, Mike Hamlin, Donald Lobsinger, Marsha Battle Philpot, Reverend Lonnie Peek, Bob Roselle, Harriett Saperstein, and Adam Shakoor.

Chene Street History Project

In what is now predominantly empty space, the Chene Street neighborhoods once comprised one of Detroit’s most vibrant commercial corridors. Chene Street was home to diverse immigrant communities: African Americans from the South, Polish Catholics, and European Jews. The area and its inhabitants come alive through the University of Michigan’s **Chene Street History Project (1890–1990)**, <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/detroitchenestreet>. This digital project aims to remember and understand Chene Street and its neighborhoods through more than 300 oral histories from former residents and business owners, photographs, and historical documents, including ethnic newspapers, church bulletins, personal papers, and ephemera. The project also features neighborhood maps

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tracking individual real estate parcels to create a richly detailed portrait of this historically important area.

Detroit Mural Project

Founded and curated by photographer and Detroit native Viranel Clerard, the **Detroit Mural Project**, <https://detroitmopa.org>, offers a digital tour of the city's street art. A useful art resource, the site boasts over 1,000 images and is the largest public archive of urban art in the nation. The collection is categorized by artist, date, location, and includes information on commissioners of authorized works. The rise of commissioned street art reflects a resurgence in Detroit's civic life and a change in the city's culture. What was once a free Detroit filled with uncommissioned art is now a competitive market for local and international artists jostling for recognition and redemption. The Detroit Mural Project documents the city's blooming art scene in a rapidly changing landscape. At the time of this writing, the website is temporarily under construction with anticipated relaunch date of March 1, 2019.

Black Abolitionist Archive

The University of Detroit Mercy's **Black Abolitionist Digital Archive**, http://research.udmercy.edu/find/special_collections/digital/baa, is a collection of over 800 speeches by black abolitionists and 1,000 editorials from the 1820s to the Civil War. In the midst of national discord, black abolitionists' voices brought credibility to the debate against slavery, forcing listeners to cast aside the "happy slave" stereotype. The collection includes speeches by famous figures such as Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Henry "Box" Brown, as well as important but less-known black abolitionists such as Sarah Parker Remond, who spoke before mixed audiences giving moving accounts of the sexual abuse of slave women; David Ruggles, the founder and leader of the New York Committee of Vigilance that sued for black freedom and whose members boarded ships arriving from the South to free slaves; and John P. Parker, a foundry man who secretly smuggled hundreds of slaves

across the Ohio River. The Black Abolitionist Digital Archive is an important resource documenting the voices and experiences of black abolitionist leaders.

E. Azalia Hackley Collection

The first archive of its kind in the world, the Detroit Public Library's **E. Azalia Hackley Collection**, <https://digitalcollections.detroitpubliclibrary.org>, raises awareness of African Americans in the performing arts from the nineteenth century to the present. A former Detroit Public School teacher, concert soprano, and activist, Emma Azalia Hackley (1867–1922) was a "race musical missionary" who traveled throughout the country performing concerts, teaching, and sharing black musical culture.¹ Begun in 1943 as a gift from the Detroit Musicians' Association (a local chapter of the National Association of Negro Musicians), the collection has since grown to include more than a quarter-million items in the library's vertical file, newspaper and magazine clippings, books, movie and concert posters, illustrated sheet music, vinyl records and CDs, photographs, recital programs, and other ephemera. The collection also includes the archives of performing artists, materials on organizations such as the Motown Recording Company, the National Association of Negro Musicians, and prominent opera singers. More than 3,000 items including photographs and sheet music are available online.



Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in performance

The Henry Ford Photographic Vertical File Series (1860–1980)

Detroit is the city that put the world on wheels. Henry Ford's automated assembly line invention developed an industry that had a global impact. Started in the 1950s as an amalgamation of items from other photograph accessions and miscellaneous sources most often accessed at The Henry Ford, the **Photographic Vertical File Series** broadly reflects Henry Ford and the Ford Motor Company. The collection is encyclopedic in its scope, documenting Ford and his family (1890–1955); Ford Motor products, buildings, and activities (1903–1955); cities and towns surrounding Ford's Village Industries; farms and homes; and Ford Motor plants and branches. The photographs also highlight World Wars I and II defense production in Ford Motor factories when Detroit was nicknamed the "Arsenal of Democracy." The collection celebrates car culture, depicting 1950s views of automobiles on city streets, country roads, and camping, and the 50th anniversary advertising campaign, "The American Road." An essential resource for understanding the rise of the car industry, this digital collection is accessible through the Benson Ford Research Center's online archive, <https://www.thehenryford.org/collections-and-research>.

Arab Americans and the Automobile—Voices from the Factory


The website of the Arab American National Museum, the only museum in the country dedicated to Arab American history and culture, hosts the digital collection **Arab Americans and the Automobile—Voices from the Factory**, <http://aanm.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/p16806coll15>.

This site offers an intimate portrait of the life and work of Arab immigrants in the automobile industry. Initiated in 1999 by the Cultural Arts Department of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, the project documents the oral histories of 15 Arab immigrants in the Metro Detroit area, illuminating their everyday lives, cultural experiences, and work histories.

The oral histories were part of a larger project, including public seminars and workshops on conducting oral history interviews, as well as a publication compiling information collected from the oral histories. The site provides access to audio recordings of oral histories, transcripts, and related documents.

Note

1. George Bulanda, "The Detroit Public Library's Hackley Collection Promotes African American Performance Artists," *Hour Detroit*, February 2012, <http://www.hourdetroit.com/core/pagetools.php?pageid=6682&url=%2FHour-Detroit%2FFebruary-2012%2FArtistic-Archives%2F&mode=print>.



The advertisement features the UW-Milwaukee logo at the top left. The main title "ARCHIVAL STUDIES" is in large, bold, yellow and white letters. Below the title, there are three bullet points: "Online & Onsite", "No residency requirement", and "MLIS & Certificate of Advanced Study (CAS)". A central text box contains the text: "UW-Milwaukee's Archival Studies Program is ranked #9 in the nation! Turn your passion into a career. Research and study in a field that mixes history, ethics, technology and social justice. Start your graduate degree today!". At the bottom right, there are two email addresses: "sois-archivesinfo@uwm.edu" and "ischool.uwm.edu". The bottom of the ad features the text "School of INFORMATION STUDIES" in white and yellow.