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History as it Happens: Interviews about Dayton School Desegregation

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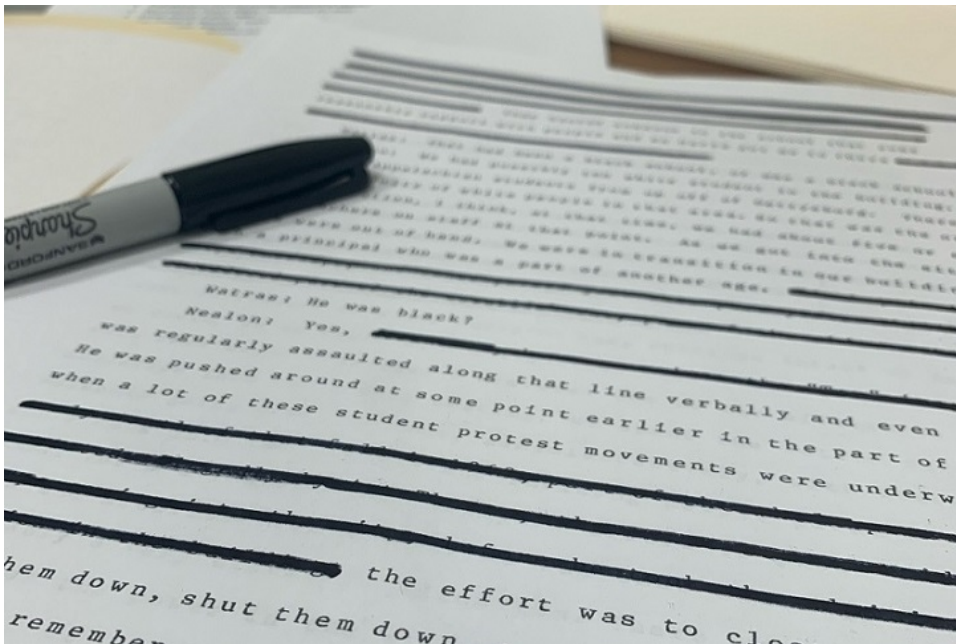
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History as it Happens: Interviews about Dayton School Desegregation

By Abbey Search

During the fall semester, I wrote a [blog post about the Joseph Watras Collection](#). Now that the semester is over, I am nearing the end of processing a portion of the collection, and I would like to give some insight into my process and my challenges.

The portion I have just finished is the oral histories collected by Watras, a teacher education professor from 1979 until his death in 2016, to help his research about school desegregation in Dayton, Ohio. He interviewed teachers and administrators in the Dayton Public Schools before and during desegregation. He had transcripts and mini cassettes for almost all of those he interviewed. Along with these were permission slips saying whether he could or could not use the transcripts and tapes in his publications. My goal is to make these tapes and transcripts available online in the University's open-access institutional repository, eCommons, to researchers who cannot make it to the archive or who are far away or who simply do not like venturing into an archive. This was my first big challenge, and it came accompanied with many small challenges.

PERMISSION REQUIRED

My first challenge was with the permission slips. I had to make sure there was something that gave Watras the right to use an interviewee's words, which in turn would allow us to make them available. Some oral histories did not come with permission slips, so those few will not be published on eCommons. Truly unfortunate, but that was the easiest problem that came with this project.

The next problem was that some of the permission slips came with "special restrictions." These restrictions

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brought two problems: One is that the interviewee had the right to edit the transcript; another was that only the edited transcript could be attributed to the interviewee and published. The first problem exists because when the edited transcript was returned to Watras, his typist, Anita Middleton, did not retype the transcript with all the edits. Therefore, all the unedited information was still visible and present. To deal with this, I had to scan the edited document, then go through and white out incorrect words and redact information they decided they no longer wished to share. The second problem was both inconvenient and unfortunate. Because only the edited transcript can be published, the audio recordings of these conversations cannot be put online for people to use. However, by making the permitted portions available, we can ensure that these voices are not entirely hidden from history.

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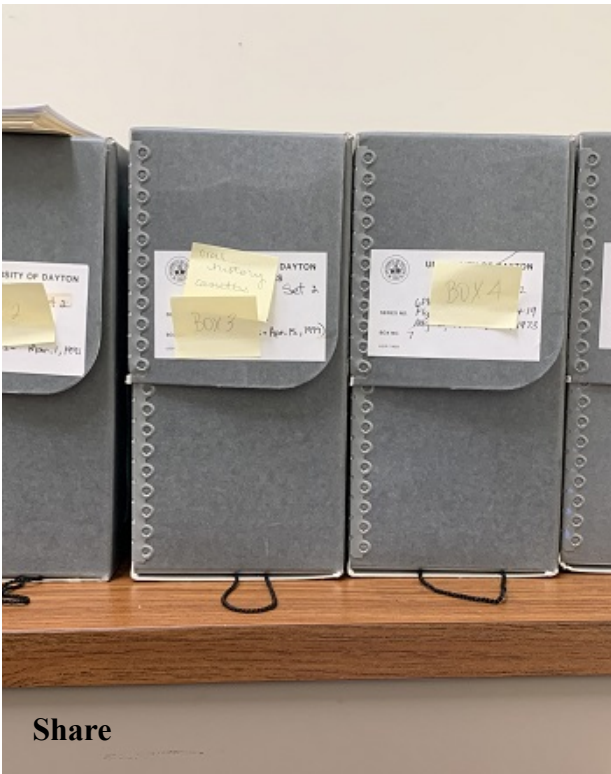
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Other than these issues, this portion of the Watras Collection was really interesting and engaging, and I am excited for the histories to be digitized and made available. The transcripts and tapes now all have a home in their own folder and in a nice archival box!

For more information about processing or available collections, you can ask any of the UD archivists or a librarian for help. Thank you so much for your interest, and I hope you find this collection as interesting as I did!

— Abbey Search is a public history graduate student at Wright State University and an intern in the University Archives and Special Collections at the University of Dayton.

Watras Collection



The Watras collection contains recordings and transcripts from interviews conducted before and during Dayton school desegregation.

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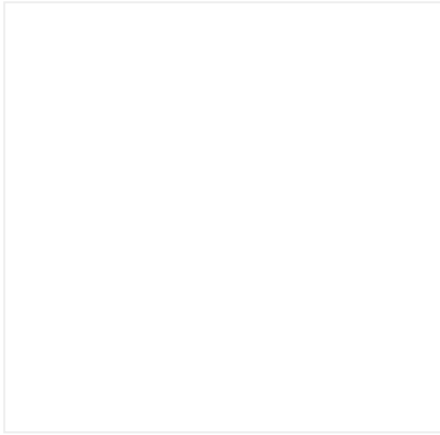
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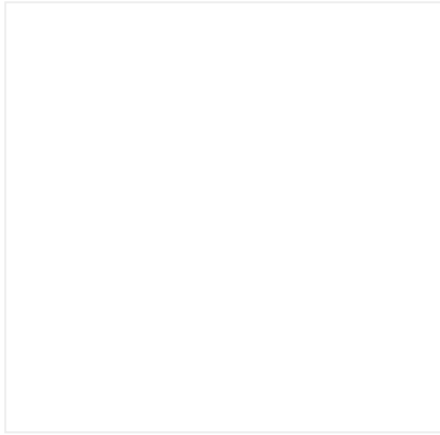
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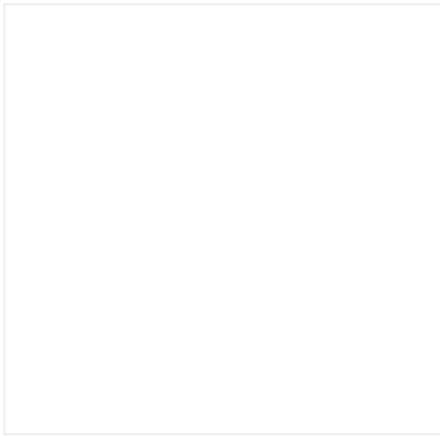
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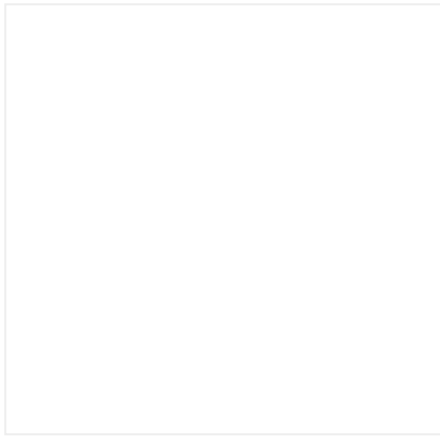
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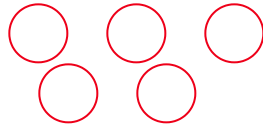
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