

## *Our Missouri Podcast*

Title: Episode 8: "Public History in Kansas City and Beyond"

Guest: Sandra Enriquez

Air Date: January 15, 2019

KEVIN WALSH: Welcome to *Our Missouri*, a podcast about the people, places, culture, and history of the 114 counties and independent city of Saint Louis that comprise the great state of Missouri. Each episode focuses on a topic related to the state ranging from publications about Missouri's history to current projects undertaken by organizations to preserve and promote local institutions. The *Our Missouri Podcast* is recorded in the J. Christian Bay Rare Books Room at the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center, and is generously provided to you by the State Historical Society of Missouri. And now, here's your host, Sean Rost.

SEAN ROST: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, or at whatever hour you are tuning in to listen to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. My name is Sean Rost and I will be your guide as we explore the memories, moments, and misfortunes from our Missouri. With this year's Missouri Conference on History coming up in March, many scholars will be going to Kansas City. To help prepare for the conference, the *Our Missouri Podcast* invites listeners to explore the City of Fountains from the confluence of two mighty rivers near the downtown skyline to the Plaza, the Paseo, and the intersection of 18th and Vine. This five-part series entitled "Going to Kansas City" focuses on several projects and institutions that document and define Kansas City's history and identity. Today, we are speaking with Sandra Enriquez. She is an assistant professor of history at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and holds a PhD in history from the University of Houston. In addition to serving as the director of the Latinx KC Oral History Project, she also supervises the public history internship program at UMKC. Before moving to Missouri, she was affiliated with several public history projects in Texas, including the Gulf Coast Food Project and the Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project. Welcome to the *Our Missouri Podcast*, Sandra Enriquez.

SANDRA ENRIQUEZ: Hi, thank you for having me.

SEAN ROST: Now, you are involved in public history projects, and, of course, serving in some capacity as an oral historian, could you tell us a little bit about what oral history is and why you feel it is important?

SANDRA ENRIQUEZ: Yes, of course. So, although many people think that, potentially, oral history is a new methodology of sorts in the world of history, we've had oral history with us since the beginning of time. As humans, we are tied to oral traditions. So, we have stories that get passed from generation to generation. So, it's nothing novel. It has not been novel since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. But, in the world of history, the sources and the methodology of it is novel, or has been novel in the last couple of decades. But, oral history is important in many ways. Like I mentioned, one, talking about oral tradition, oral histories are important in the fact

that they allow us to collect and recover narratives and histories of underrepresented groups. Of groups that may not have the privilege to leave written records behind. So, I'm thinking about racial minorities, ethnic minorities, women, children, just people and groups of people that do not have the privilege or the means to leave diaries and letters behind. So, it's important because we recover the histories of communities that may not be represented in the traditional sense of archives. Not in government documents, not in newspaper articles, etc. So, that's why it's important. A second reason why it's important, and to me this is, I think, what matters the most, is the fact that oral history allows you to create a process with a subject in history. I think that no other source, archival source that you may find in a library allows you to create a relationship with a subject. So, it's not just about the document itself that's being created, but it's about the process of creating that document. So, in the process of creating that document, you're connecting with a member of a community that may not necessarily leave archives behind. You're not only giving voice to the person who is helping you create this document, this new archive, but you're also creating a relationship with the person. And so, for me, that's the most important part of oral history. And then lastly, I think that oral history gives us a more nuanced understanding of the human experience through history. So, thinking about how oral history can shed light on emotions and feelings that may not be easily translatable through the documents. Being able to know how people actually felt. Know the reflections of people and their participation in certain historic events. So, for me, that's also important because it gives us a little more nuanced understanding of what history is and the human experience has been throughout events. For example, in my own work, my own academic work, oral history has allowed me to really shed light on people's emotions and attachment to urban space, for example. So, while politicians and developers may see a neighborhood as a crumbling space, as a dilapidated space, oral history has given me the kind of ability to reconstruct that even though physically the space may be crumbling and dilapidated that people have created roots and have created attachment to the particular space. I don't think any other source could have allowed me to do that.

SEAN ROST: For people who might be interested in beginning oral history or really starting it in their local communities, what's the best thing that you can think about to tell them to start an oral history? What best practice or something to consider?

SANDRA ENRIQUEZ: Yeah. I always abide by this one book, it's an old—well, not old book—but it's been around for a while, but it's a fantastic guide to doing oral history, and it's actually called *Doing Oral History* by Donald Ritchie. I think the book—if you just want to start something oral history related or an oral history project and you don't know where to start it's a great manual—I see it as a manual—that gives you the history of oral history. It addresses ethics and problems that may arise during oral history, but it really prepares you. I think that it is a very easy to read book that can get you started. So, every time that a student is coming to my office and saying, "You know, I think I want to become an oral historian," and if they haven't taken my class, I usually give them *Doing Oral History* for them to start reading and then we have a discussion on it because I think it's probably the best book that kind of just covers so much ground on the field itself. So, I'd do that. I'd also really start thinking about—I think that the most important part of oral history, as well, is having a repository. So, I would contact people in your community, especially those that already have archives and archive holdings, about depositing

your oral histories. Then, you'd work with already having consent forms and all that which is part of the ethical practice of oral history. And then, the last thing, I would say invest in a really good recorder. I think that we don't—as oral historians, we sometimes don't think about how fast technology moves. And so, you just want to make sure that you have the best possible audio quality as you're conducting your oral histories because as you're collecting this narrative you want to make sure that it survives the various changes in technology. So, for example, we have wonderful, wonderful oral histories that were conducted here in Kansas City like in the 1950s, but they're not digitized and they're not preserved digitally. And so, these technologies, if we play them, we run the risk of damaging them. So, thinking ahead in a preservation way, that is very important to also make sure that you have a good quality recorder that may survive the test of time.

SEAN ROST: I completely agree. I'm thinking of a lot of the collections we have here that are—yeah—'50s, '60s, '70s that are just—every time they're used they are going to be less and less likely to work the second time or the third time, or even the devices we use to play them on can break and thus break the recorder or the tape or the reel-to-reel at the same time. So, completely agree with that. That is so true. You mentioned some of the work you did in your own research. Now, prior to joining the faculty at UMKC at an assistant professor, what were some of the public history projects you were involved in graduate school and around that time.

SANDRA ENRIQUEZ: So, I've been fortunate to participate in many projects. Not only oral history related, but also just more public history, relatively speaking. So, when I was doing my master's in history at the University of Texas at El Paso, that's when my love for public history began. I enrolled in a public history course that changed my life. I signed up with Dr. Yolanda Leyva, who is the culprit as to why I am a public historian today. But, we were able to work on this project that was celebrating the one hundredth anniversary of the Mexican Revolution in the El Paso/Ciudad Juarez border. So, it was looking at the role of the border city in the Mexican Revolution. We had an exhibit that was displayed in November of 2010 at the anniversary of the Mexican Revolution. We were able to design this exhibit about the social, cultural, and economic ramifications of El Paso being a border city during this conflict. And so, it was displayed in the El Paso History Museum for about a year. So, I got to be a co-curator for that. Then from that project, we did another project that was a little more grassroots. So, the history department, particularly the folks who were in that public history program, created what we called Museo Urbano, or the Urban Museum, and through this project we rented an old tenement, a couple of tenement units, in the historic Segundo Barrio, or the second ward of El Paso, which is a border community. We created exhibits tied to the building itself, but also to the Mexican-American community there. So, talking about the role of the neighborhood for over a century. It was very grassroots. There was community participation through it. There was community programming and an education component. It was very grassroots, so it was nothing like you've seen in a traditional museum sense. And so, that all happened as I was leaving the master's program. Then, when I arrived at the University of Houston, I served as an oral historian for the Gulf Coast Food Project, which is a broader project that is trying to chronicle the role of food and food history in the region. So, I was able to interview folks that their oral histories were then part of a documentary. So, my particular group had the task of chronicling the farm-to-table movement in

Houston and looking at how farmers who are in the outskirts of Houston—which is a large—the fourth largest city, almost the third largest city in the country—and how that movement of knowing where your food is coming from was starting to take off there. And then from there, the most important that I've worked on, by in large in scale and scope, I served as an oral historian for a project that is run out of TCU, or Texas Christian University, called the Civil Rights in Black and Brown Oral History Project. And so, I've been involved with this project since 2015. It's a project that is trying to compare, contrast, and connect both the African American Civil Rights Movement and the Chicano/Latino Civil Rights Movement in Texas. So for two summers I was in the field conducting—I've conducted over 100 interviews with folks that were in Houston, Galveston, and then along the border. So, south Texas, places like McAllen and Brownsville, Laredo, and El Paso. We were able to collect some really great oral histories of people that were involved in movements, not only of the time that we think about as the civil rights movement like in the '60s and '70s, but also in contemporary times. We were able to really uncover some interesting narratives of connections from the past to today. It was very fulfilling for me.

SEAN ROST: Right now you serve as the public history emphasis at UMKC in the history department. Could you tell us a little bit about this program?

SANDRA ENRIQUEZ: Yes. So, the public history program, unlike other programs around the region, we try to focus on a holistic approach to public history. So, often time when we think about public history, we think about museum studies and the works of museums. And, yes, that is a large part of public history, but it is a little more robust than that. So, our program tries to cover the various ways in which you can use your history degree or your history skills on a more public setting. So, that means if you want to be an oral historian, if you want to be in museum studies, or if you want to work at a library, or at a non-profit, there's various ways that you can apply your historical skills and your public history skills. So, we try to approach public history in a more holistic way than simply just like, for example, museum studies or curatorial work. So, the program is an emphasis. We train you first and foremost to be a historian, but the emphasis allows you to really hone in on some of the skills that public historians need. And then, we allow you take advantage of all of the great cultural institutions that Kansas City has. I think when I moved to Kansas City two and a half years ago one of the first things that I heard was that Kansas City has more museums per capita than New York City. And granted, we don't have the same population as New York City, but we do have a vast number of cultural and heritage and historical institutions in the city. So, what we allow you to do, you take an introduction class, you take electives, but the best part is that—well, two of the best parts—one is you take internships, whether they're paid or unpaid, at one of the many institutions that Kansas City has to offer. And then that as you're going through your coursework, you're building a portfolio, your own professional portfolio. At the end, you have a culminating project which is our capstone public history project, and that's anything goes that is public history. I've had students do interpretive plans for exhibits. I've had students do oral history anthologies. I have a student who is currently working on doing a documentary film. I've had students doing walking tours. Also, digital components and digital humanities projects and websites. So, the whole program allows you to really build up a portfolio, not only building your skills, but building up a portfolio so

when you're ready to go on the job market I can probably say my students have said, "I've worked on these projects and here were my contributions and this is how I actually applied my experience." I think that public history programs sometimes can teach you all the theory and basics, but if you don't have that hands-on experience it can be a little detrimental so we try to give you the hands-on experience through your coursework, through your capstone project, and obviously through the internship component of it.

SEAN ROST: Now, so students when they're affiliated with this emphasis and they're projects and internships, they're doing them throughout the entire Kansas City metropolitan area, right?

SANDRA ENRIQUEZ: Yes.

SEAN ROST: What are some of the institutions that they are working with that people might be familiar with?

SANDRA ENRIQUEZ: So, we currently have as part of our competitive positions that we offer graduate students, we have four paid internships. So, these four paid internships are through— one of them is through the Kansas City Chiefs. Again, it's like thinking beyond historical sites. So, the Chiefs have the Arrowhead Art Collection and we have a student who is helping out with educational programming as well as curating parts of it. So, that's one. We have a student working with the Kansas City office of the Missouri Humanities Council. Again, it's more on the educational. We have a student working with ContemPlace, which is a non-profit arm of Eisterhold & Associates, which is a curatorial firm up in North Kansas City. And then, we have one—well, we have a couple other ones—we have one working for our digital history lab, which is where most of our public history and digital history projects are coming out of. And then, I have a student, too, working with me on creating an exhibit on the Guadalupe Center and I can talk about that in a little bit. But, those are our paid ones. We also have other partners that have helped us get students experience through contractual work or through unpaid internships. So, we have a good standing relationship with the Wornall Majors House Museums, with the Jackson County Historical Society, and many, many other institutions that have opened the doors to our students and allowed them—World War I Museum—that have allowed them to gain really critical experience.

SEAN ROST: Before we return to our conversation, let's take a step back in time with Bob Priddy to an event from this week in history in a "Missouri Minute."

BOB PRIDDY: I'm Bob Priddy with this "Missouri Minute." Father John Cummings delivered his homily that Sunday morning in Louisiana, Missouri, and was shortly thereafter arrested for preaching illegally. Father Cummings had not taken the oath of loyalty to the state of Missouri required in the new state constitution written as the Civil War ended. It prohibited men from practicing their professions unless they took the oath demanded by Radical Republicans who didn't want former Confederates in private and public positions. Father Cummings refused to pay his fine and was thrown in jail. He refused to be released on bond and appealed his case to the state supreme court which ruled unanimously against him despite arguments the loyalty oath violated his freedom of religion. The prosecution argued a church is only an association of individuals shared a common view they claim is divine. The case went to the U.S. Supreme

Court that ruled on January 14, 1867, by only one vote, that the loyalty oath constituted punishment without judicial trial, a presumption of guilt until a person could prove innocence. I'm Bob Priddy for the Center for Missouri Studies.

SEAN ROST: Now, you kind of hinted at it there, but one of the big projects that you're currently working on and involved with is you are the director of the Latinx KC Oral History Project. Could you tell us about the origins of that and really what your overall goals are as that project moves along?

SANDRA ENRIQUEZ: Yeah. So, when I got to Kansas City, I was very excited—as a Mexican-American immigrant—I was really excited to come to a place that, although it was very far away from home—I'm originally from the Ciudad Juarez/El Paso, Texas region—I was really excited to come in to a city that has had a long history of Latinos and Latinx and Mexican-American communities throughout the history of the city. So, I was very excited. As being the historian that I am, I quickly started asking everyone, "Well, where are the Latinx archives? Do we have any?" And to my not shocking surprise, there is very little that has been collected when it comes to the Latinx community. And now, Mexican-Americans and Latinos have had a really long history here in Kansas City. I mean, thinking about trails. The Santa Fe Trail. The arrival of the railroad. So, it's not a new population. They've been part of the fabric of this city for generations. I knew that I was going to start teaching an oral history class, and I thought, "Well, why not merge the need to train my students in the methods, theories, and practices of oral history, but why not also start a large project that will serve as a means to collect as many histories of the Latinx community here in Kansas City." So, that's how it started. It started out in the spring of 2017, and started with five very shy, but excited, students who were throughout the semester learning not only about Latino history in the city and in the United States, but about what is oral history, why should we use it, and how do we apply it to our own historical studies as well. And so, they went out into the community and conducted oral histories based on their own topics of interest. The first year we collected ten oral histories. Then, I taught the course again on a much larger scale. So, in the second reiteration of the project, I believe we now have about twenty-six oral histories and growing. These oral histories are not only chronicling the lives of people from the early histories of Latinos in Kansas City to contemporary issues. So, they're anywhere from social activism, education, discrimination, cultural, culture, healthcare, etc. So, they vary in scope and theme. These are all going to be archived at the LaBudde Special Collections up at UMKC for access to anyone who wants to use them. There's also a digital history component to the oral history project. These oral histories the students have done interpretative essays that are up online digitally through a WordPress website which is [info.umkc.edu/latinxkc](http://info.umkc.edu/latinxkc) and there you can find snippets of the oral histories and interpretative essays that connect them to the larger context of the histories that the students have chosen to write about. Although, as I said, I've been here for two and a half years, so it's slowly starting, but my vision for it is to really create a robust archive of Latinx histories in the region and to really show the long roots of the community in Kansas City, especially as our current environment thinks that Latinos are new arrivals [and] that we have not had a long role in the history of this country. I hope that through these histories we can demonstrate that no Latinos

and the Latinx community has been here for a while and they've been part of the fabric of Kansas City and of Missouri and the Midwest.

SEAN ROST: Have there been any other projects through UMKC or through your own work that people might be able to find online in a digital format?

SANDRA ENRIQUEZ: Yeah. So, we've had—well, this one is just starting so in a couple of years you'll be able to find something. I'm partnering up with one of my colleagues in the history department, her name is Rebecca Davis, and the support of Shook, Hardy & Bacon, which is a law firm, and creating another oral history project, in a way, that also has a digital component. It's called Profiles in Kansas City Activism. This project is doing profiles of important civil rights activists throughout Kansas City history from all walks of life, from various racial/ethnic groups and gender groups. We hope to build a larger archive of people who have been significant to the history of Kansas City as well through social movements. So, we are getting that rolling here in a little bit. So, in a couple of years that will be going. And, yeah, digitally that's another project that I am working on. There's others that are cooking up in my brain, so hopefully people will have access to them within the near future.

SEAN ROST: You mentioned some of the projects you're working on, but you're on also preparing to publish a book too. Could you tell us a little bit about that project?

SANDRA ENRIQUEZ: Yeah. So, I write about my hometown of El Paso, Texas. El Paso, Texas was considered by many at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the Ellis Island of the Southwest. So, as people are coming and immigrating to the United States at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a lot of them are making a community in South El Paso, Texas, or Segundo Barrio, which is a very historic Mexican-American neighborhood in the Southwest. So, my book, which is roughly entitled *El Barrio No Se Vende*, so it's "The Neighborhood's Not For Sale," chronicles these struggles of the Mexican-American community to prevent the bulldozer from taking their neighborhood in the 1970s and early '80s. You see some very fruitful grassroots community preservation efforts that stem from the desire to protect their communities. But also, you see a rise in political mobilization and the politicizing of a community. So, the way that this starts is that there's a resolution of a 100 year old boundary, international boundary dispute between the United States and Mexico. So, in the 1860s and 1880s, you have a couple historic floods that shift the channel of the Rio Grande, which is the boundary of the United States down in the southern border. What happens is that parts of Mexican land ends up on the U.S. side, and there's a 100 year old dispute on who's legally the owner of this land and whatnot. So, in the '60s this resolved and as the land is returned to Mexico and the boundary is shifted, this community becomes a space that could renew what many deemed as the front yard to the United States. And so, you have this blank slate, in a way, for the neighborhood to become commercialized or industrialized, and then you have a couple of tenement buyers as well that give rise to the need to redevelop the community. So, you start seeing a great number of displaced families that have nowhere to go because these are all working class families that can't afford to live elsewhere in the city. You have a housing shortage. And so, this kind of emergency that people have nowhere to go gives impetus to the formation of a couple of community groups that really fight for what they call the regeneration of their community. So, they want to not only bring better housing to

the neighborhood because they were all living in mostly tenements that were dilapidated. So, when you think about these tenements, you can think about Lower East Side in New York City with thousands of families living in one building. But, this is in the '70s, in the 1970s. The activists, these groups, want to bring better housing, but they also want to solve issues of poverty and social ills as they're organizing. So, they negotiate urban redevelopment with the city and housing and urban development officials. They create their own non-profit group so they can get federal funds to actually bring housing on their own terms. They also become squatters in properties that are marked for demolition and, essentially, purchase the tenements and work through sweat equity and better the conditions of them. And then, they also try to culturally revive the community so they start planting community gardens and painting murals around the neighborhood. And so, you see this very robust community preservation movement that is happening there that essentially preserves a community. Although it was wounded and it was heavily de-populated, the community still stands today and I think that with every city dealing with gentrification and displacement that we should take a look back and look at these histories because the approaches that the Mexican-American community was taking in El Paso were not necessarily novel because they were elsewhere. And so, I think there's important lessons for our current situation right now about well how do we incorporate communities, especially historic communities of color, into these redevelopment plans that often ignore their needs, that never take their lives or their roots and attachment to their physical space that they've lived in for generations into consideration.

SEAN ROST: Fascinating. Okay. Very interesting to think about and to consider. Well, thank you very much for being on the podcast with us today.

SANDRA ENRIQUEZ: Well, thank you so much for inviting me in.

SEAN ROST: Thanks for listening to this week's episode. As always, I am your host, Sean Rost. The show's producer is Brian Austin. The opening and concluding credits are narrated by Kevin Walsh. If you are interested in more of the people, places, culture, and history around our Missouri, check out the following upcoming events:

With the State Historical Society of Missouri's Columbia Research Center slated to be closed from spring to midsummer 2019 for the move to the newly constructed Center for Missouri Studies, you only have a few weeks left to view three featured art exhibits. In the corridor gallery, the exhibit "Work Artwork" consists of art by staff members and volunteers from the Historical Society's six research centers across the state. In the Main Gallery, visitors will find two exhibits, "Benton's Perilous Visions" and "The Aesthetic of the Monumental Figure." To learn more about these, and other, exhibitions, please visit [shsmo.org/art/exhibits/](http://shsmo.org/art/exhibits/).

National History Day in Missouri is looking for educators, historians, writers, filmmakers, museum staff, and community members to join them at this year's state contest to judge student projects. The state contest will be held on April 27, 2019 at the University of Missouri in Columbia. To thank you for your essential participation in National History Day in Missouri 2019, the State Historical Society of Missouri will provide a light breakfast and lunch, plus a travel stipend of up to \$50 for judges whose round trip mileage exceeds 75 miles. National History Day in Missouri is a unique opportunity for middle and high school age students to

explore the past in a creative, hands-on way by producing a documentary, exhibit, paper, performance, or website on a topic of their choosing. To learn more about National History Day in Missouri, including judge orientation and how to start a program at your own school, please visit [shsmo.org/nhdmo/](http://shsmo.org/nhdmo/).

On February 4th, join the State Historical Society of Missouri's Joan Stack and Faith Ordonio in Room 114A of the University of Missouri's Ellis Library for a curators' presentation of "Exodus: Images of Black Migration in Missouri and Beyond, 1866–1940." This exhibition explores how thousands of African Americans came to and through Missouri while seeking greater political, economic, and social opportunity. Images from the Historical Society's collections offer insights into the movement of African Americans from their first great exodus out of the South after the Civil War to relocations sparked by violence, repression, natural disasters, and the turmoil of the Great Depression. Viewed together, the artwork, including fine art prints by George Caleb Bingham and Thomas Hart Benton, creates an overall picture of American life in an era of dramatic change. This event is sponsored by the University of Missouri Libraries and the MU Black History Month Committee.

On March 2, join Joan Stack, Curator of Art Collections for the State Historical Society of Missouri, at the Arrow Rock State Historic Site Visitors Center for "United We Stand" a public presentation on how George Caleb Bingham's Election Series paintings showcase his views of America's constitutional democracy in the mid-19th Century.

The sixty-first annual Missouri Conference on History, hosted by the University of Missouri–Kansas City and Park University and sponsored by the State Historical Society of Missouri, will be held March 6–8, 2019, at the Holiday Inn Country Club Plaza in Kansas City. For more information about the Missouri Conference on History, please visit [shsmo.org/mch](http://shsmo.org/mch).

If you are interested in learning more about Missouri's upcoming bicentennial in 2021, there will be two opportunities in March to hear from bicentennial coordinator Michael Sweeney. On March 12th, Michael will be at the Friends Room of the Columbia Public Library. On March 16th, Michael will be joined by senior archivist Claire Marks at the Jefferson County Library's Northwest Branch in High Ridge. To register and learn more about these events, please visit the State Historical Society of Missouri's website at [shsmo.org/events](http://shsmo.org/events).

KEVIN WALSH: Thank you for listening to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. If you would like to learn more about the podcast, including past and future episodes, information about guests, and upcoming events, please visit our website at [shsmo.org/our-missouri](http://shsmo.org/our-missouri).