

The MU Campus and Environmental Awareness: Expansion from the 1960s to Today

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Abstract

In the 1970s, historians began to develop an interest in environmental history: the interaction of humans and the environment. This area of history is now very active. Along with offering an introduction to the methods and insights of environmental history, History 218 in Spring 2020 has included an oral history project focused on the campus. This research and service learning project contributes to the campus commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the first Earth Day in 1970. Interview transcripts will be archived with the MU Oral History Collection.

Between March 1 and 11, 2020, students in History 218.01 and 218.02, taught by Dr. Tanya Kevorkian, interviewed eleven narrators who were on the Millersville campus as students, staff, or faculty in the 1960s, 1970s, and/or 1980s. The alumni grew up in central or eastern Pennsylvania and have stayed in Lancaster County. Staff and faculty, who have retired and stayed in the area or are still teaching, brought experiences and perspectives from growing up and studying around the U.S. and beyond. Groups of students interviewed one

person each, transcribed the interviews, did additional research, and wrote papers and a summary paragraph. This article begins with those summaries. Students then added general insights by examining the interviews together. Those insights conclude the article.

The four alumni attended Millersville between the mid-1960s and mid-1970s. Janis Hohenwarter arrived when she was 21 years old, living off campus. Since she commuted to Millersville and worked, she was not involved much with campus activities. She spent some time working at

the library, and mentioned how much it has changed since then. There were no laptops, computers or any form of high end technology while she studied here. Janis spoke of the bipartisan Clean Water Act and how it affected the community and environment. She also spoke about how companies now are starting to make packaging for sodas and other liquids environmentally safe, for example using seaweed instead of plastic, which turtles and other sea animals can consume. Janis mentioned how pollution was a big problem outside her home in Lancaster City when she was growing up, especially vehicle exhaust. Janis says she does not remember Earth Day or any celebrations of it. She does say she has always been environmentally friendly so she has done anything she can to help, like picking up trash and recycling.

Susan began her studies at Millersville in 1966. She witnessed a great period of change in Millersville's history. She was part of the last generation of students to live in Old Main and to experience communal, family-style dining on campus. Additionally, she experienced many of the new buildings, including dorms, going up in the mid to late 1960s. Susan is active with the environment, including taking materials to the Lancaster County Solid Waste Management Authority recycling center. She has made her backyard a wildlife habitat certified by the National Wildlife Federation. She is familiar with the bulldozing of the woods behind campus known as The Bush, in work later discovered to be directly related to the construction of Millersville's South Village. Susan also described her early Earth Day experiences. She recalls the wealth of educational programs and awareness campaigns at the time of the first Earth Day, as well as the introduction of ecological science into Millersville's curriculum.

Two other students studied history and overlapped for a year, although they did not

know each other. Tom Hassler grew up near Harrisburg, and attended Millersville State College from 1968 to 1971. He was very active in antiwar protests on and off campus as well as the college newspaper. Tom explained that there were few food options around campus at the time, and you couldn't get a plastic take away food container. Because of this concentration of food production, the waste was far less than what we experience today, so recycling wasn't around yet. Tom attended Millersville during the first Earth Day in 1970, but emphasized that it was more about the concept and less about being an event. He explained that the only departments that really participated in Earth Day events were the biology department and the philosophy department's social activism club.

Joseph (Mike) Herman was a student at Millersville from 1970 to 1974. He commuted from Lancaster, and went on to teach and coach at Penn Manor High School. While he was a student, the environmental movement was just starting, and one group led initiatives. The biology department offered classes that educated students on our environment. One class that Mike took was Field Biology, which allowed students to go outside and learn about the environment through a hands-on experience. Mike shared that during the 1970s the campus was not as built up as it is today. There was even enough open space that students were able to hunt right behind where the Student Memorial Center is now. Mike does not remember all of the details of Earth Day at Millersville, but he did recall students wearing green to show their support for the environment. Talking with Mike and conducting research for this project has shown the great progress we have made on environmental issues since the 1970s, but there is still a long way to go.

Two narrators worked on the staff. Dick Kendig began his career at Millersville

University in 1972 when he was 25, after serving in the military. Until he retired in 2005 as a maintenance supervisor, he would work day in and day out in an effort to make Millersville a better and brighter place for everyone on campus. Mr. Kendig noted in the interview that before recycling swept the campus, they would send one trash truck around to clean up everything. He recalls that after recycling practices made their way onto campus, the university was able to sell aluminum cans to recyclers. He not only played a role in the visual changes in the environment, but also did jobs that cannot be seen by the average person. New waterways and drainage designs were carried out by Mr. Kendig and his crew of workers. One of the biggest changes that took place during his time at MU was the move from coal to electric heat. Not only was this a cleaner option for the environment, but it made it easier for students to heat or cool their rooms. He mentioned many times the significance of the ecosystem and made clear the role that people must take to ensure a better future. Since before any of us current students were born and to the present day, Dick Kendig has loved and still cares for the Millersville environment.

Roma Sayre moved from Ohio to Millersville in 1981. Her family was very involved with Millersville; both she and her husband worked on campus and both of her daughters graduated from the University. She worked in the office of the President and other offices, and was also involved with the annual Native Plants Conference and gardening at her church. Roma recalled the first green building, Stayer Hall, being built. When Roma first arrived, recycling was a big part of the school and Millersville would receive awards and money for having the most recyclable material. The school would have days for the staff and faculty to go outside and enjoy the environment and hike or walk around campus to promote a

healthy living. Also during Roma's time here, the bus service began promoting public transit for students and staff, leading to the lowering of carbon emissions. The Native Plants Conference played a huge role in the school and promoting the care for the environment. It is clear Millersville tried to be a green campus and environmentally conscious and is continuing this path. Millersville took Earth Day seriously. There would be a big event on the day, with clubs setting up booths and events that the students and the community could partake in. There were bands, signups for students to contribute to environmental issues, games, and bouncy houses. It was a day when students, staff, and faculty could contribute to the environment and learn how they could help.

The other five narrators are faculty members in departments around MU who arrived in the 1970s and 1980s. Dr. Zenaida Uy was born in the Philippines and grew up in the period of reconstruction after World War II. She received her doctorate in physics from Stony Brook University. When she arrived at Millersville in 1981, she was the first female physics professor and one of few female professors, especially in the sciences. Her environmental takeaways include a deeper understanding of how progressive Millersville University is. The school always tried to stay ahead of environmental trends. An example of this is that as early as the 1990s, Millersville increased the number of recycling waste receptacles on campus. This drive stemmed partly from awareness of Earth Day and its impact on environmental watchfulness. John Osborn was the head of the Priority group at the campus in the 70s and 80s, constantly pushing the college to healthier and safer practices.

Dr. Len Litowitz, who arrived at Millersville in 1986 after studying energy consumption, conservation and

sustainability, is Professor and Chair of the Department of Applied Engineering, Safety and Technology. Environmentally speaking, a lot of things have changed since the 1980s. We now know more about the way we impact the environment, and we understand the extent to which it's been impacted. Millersville University has become more aware, but has the capacity to do more. Dr. Litowitz remembers Earth Day having its most prominent profile in the 1970s. However, since then people's overall awareness of the environment has increased. With the aid of technology, efforts to conserve and remedy harmful effects on the environment have been integrated into our daily lives, making the population more environmentally conscious not only on Earth Day, but in making everyday decisions.

Dr. Marjorie Warmkessel worked at the Millersville University library. Originally from Providence, Rhode Island, she arrived in 1978, first working in Special Collections and then in library instruction, as acting director, and in interlibrary loan and tech services. She said that the expansion of campus brought a lot of new people into Millersville, and caused people to disconnect from each other more than when it was a smaller school. There were also more cars going in and out of campus, which most likely caused air pollution and CO2 levels on campus to rise. In addition, the habitats in the Bush area were partially destroyed when the new dorms were added, causing a decrease in wildlife on campus. Dr. Warmkessel remembers that on the first Earth Day she was still a high school student and that there were a lot of conversations and promotions of it on the news and shows.

Another faculty member, Dr. Marlene Arnold, a current professor of anthropology, had a lot to share about campus history and landscape since she moved here in 1981. She mentioned over-producing materials for class. When she first started working at

Millersville, professors would only make the amount necessary since the school only had one Xerox machine. She now notices a large amount of material being wasted, not only paper but also food containers from the dining halls. Dr. Arnold was also very impressed by the scenery at Millersville when she first arrived here. She thought that the landscape was truly beautiful. When she was in high school, she actually celebrated and took part in the very first Earth Day due to her role in Student Government, but she admitted that in the 80s, people weren't really focused on the environment because they (those who left high school in the late 60s early 70s) thought they had already solved big environmental issues.

Last but not least, Dr. Doug Frazer has been a professor at Millersville since 1979. Born in Washington, DC, he took a job as an accountant for Armstrong in Lancaster. He decided to see if Millersville had teaching opportunities, and was offered a position in what was then the business and economics department. His memories of an initially small amount of copying and printing equipment echoed those of Dr. Arnold. He also recalled the gradual introduction of computers, and classrooms without the technology that is taken for granted now. In contrast to earlier student memories of many new buildings going up, Dr. Frazer remembers more renovation projects. As part of the team for the McComsey expansion that was completed in 2003, he helped design the McComsey Hall that we see today, adding windows for natural light and energy conservation. Dr. Frazer says that he is not that environmentally conscious and does not consider himself an environmental activist, but mentioned that he always enjoyed nature and visiting state parks with family when he was younger. He remembers how polluted the Potomac River was, and the clean-up efforts that eventually started.

Students spent a lot of time outdoors in the 60s and early 70s, before and after they arrived at MU. Janis Hohenwarter walked eight to ten blocks to her elementary school in Lancaster City, swam in a pool in Buchanan Park, and gardened outside the apartment she rented as an MU student. Susan said that "we enjoyed the outdoors and the Bush," and made outings to Cold Cave in Pequea. Mike Herman hunted with a small group of students near where the SMC was later built. Students lived and studied without modern technology. They used manual typewriters and pay phones. Susan, who lived in Old Main her first year, opened windows instead of turning on air conditioning, and had minimal electricity available in her dorm room.

Even though students were in tune with the outdoors and didn't use computers and cell phones, they, faculty, and staff all said that there was not much environmental awareness until the late 1960's. They remember the first Earth Day emerging partly in reaction to the pollution of rivers. They remembered the first Earth Day whether they were already at Millersville or not. They agreed that members of the biology department, including Kenneth Miller and Syd Radinovsky, were the first to be aware of environmental issues, teaching courses on ecology and starting early recycling efforts.

The narrators also agreed that over time, awareness of environmental issues has become much more mainstream, and lots of people from different backgrounds participate in some way. By the 1980's and 1990's, there were campaigns around paper use: Roma Sayre participated in competitions among the PA SSHE universities to recycle the most paper. Dr. Marlene Arnold emphasized that faculty

used less paper then than now. However, recycling has become more systematic on campus. Beyond the "Big Four" that are currently gathered, Dr. Litowitz has helped build up elaborate recycling capabilities in Osburn Hall, including the ability to shred plastic bottles, a battery recycling center, and a kiln to make ingots from waste glass. He continues to teach courses on energy and power. He says that "there's an increasing percentage of people who would like to do the right thing, but it's [growing] in small increments." This awareness has grown at a time when the environment is struggling more than ever before and requires much more attention.

People on campus, even students who studied at the same time, have had very different experiences. In that sense, there are many different Millersvilles. The university and its physical plant are large and complex. People also notice different things about the environment depending on their backgrounds. For example, Dr. Zenaida Uy was impressed with snowplowing on campus, while Dr. Marlene Arnold's graduate school training in Native American culture led her to regard trees on campus as living things that watch generations of humans. Dr. Doug Frazer considered the impact that the higher expense of constructing "green" buildings could have on tuition. In addition, people's roles on campus lead to an involvement with different dimensions of the physical plant. Dick Kendig influenced the workings of many buildings on campus, while Dr. Doug Frazer contributed to the installation of energy-efficient windows in McComsey as a member of the design team for the renovation completed in 2003.

For all the diversity of experience, narrators who have studied or worked on campus in the past fifty-plus years have shared experiences with buildings and the landscape. They agreed that the most

significant environmental change on campus has been the construction or expansion of many buildings and the demolition of others, including Old Main and older dormitories. As a result of new construction, the "heart of campus" (Dr. Len Litowitz) has shifted from the area around the pond to the other side of George Street, around classroom buildings such as McComsey, Osburn, and Roddy,

new dormitories, and Lombardo. While some narrators see this expansion as positive, others emphasize the loss of habitat that has resulted. Regardless of their opinions, though, they share a sense of the beauty of the campus.

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