Nick Pavlik:

Okay. Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Jerome Library at Bowling Green State University. Thank you so much for attending today's program, which is part of the Local History Publication Award Fall Lecture Series, sponsored by the Center for Archival Collections, or the CAC. My name is Nick Pavlik. I'm the Curator of Manuscripts and Digital Projects at the CAC. I also serve as the current chair of the CAC's Local History Publication Awards Committee. The CAC's annual Local History Publication Award is an extension of its mission to collect, preserve, and provide access to historical and archival records relating to Northwest Ohio.

Nick Pavlik:

The award was established to encourage and recognize authors of outstanding publications about Northwest Ohio history, with awards being given in both academic scholar and independent scholar divisions. Each division winner is awarded $300 and a plaque, and is invited to Jerome Library to give a public talk on their work. It's my pleasure to welcome Doctor Rebecca Mancuso, Associate Professor in the BGSU Department of History, to Jerome Library today as the winner of our 2018 Local History Publication Award in the academic scholar division, for her article “The Finger Saga: One Museum's Quest to Turn the Macabre into the Meaningful,” which was published in the journal *The Public Historian* in May 2018.

Nick Pavlik:

A Canadian specialist, Doctor Mancuso's scholarly mission involves fostering a better understanding of the importance of Canada to the United States and the world. Her general field of research is immigration policy history in the Canadian context. Her publications, appearing in the American Review of Canadian Studies, the British Journal of Canadian Studies, Canadian Ethnic Studies, and other peer reviewed journals, center on British immigration to Canada as a nationalist project. She's currently working on a manuscript, “Nothing but Debts and Worries: Canada’s Three Thousand Family Scheme and Empire Settlement, 1919-1939,” which explores newcomers' struggles to adapt to Canadians' notions of immigration success.

Nick Pavlik:

In 2013, she held the Fulbright Research Chair at the University of Calgary in Alberta. Doctor Mancuso currently coordinates the Canadian Studies Academic Program at BGSU. The courses she regularly teaches include History of Canada, Introduction to Canadian Studies, and a senior research seminar on race and ethnicity in North America. She also has a strong interest in public history and has served as Vice President of the Board of Directors for the Wood County Historical Society.

Nick Pavlik:

As a final note, in addition to today's program, we will also be hosting our final local history publication award lecture later this Fall. Thursday, November 14th, we'll be welcoming our independent scholar division award winners, Patricia Beach, Susan Eisel, Maria Nowicki, Judy Szor, and Beth White, for a talk on their book *Caps, Capes, and Caring: The Legacy of Diploma Nursing Schools in Toledo*, published by the University of Toledo Press. For more information on this talk, I encourage you to visit the upcoming events page on the university library's website. For now, please join me in welcoming Doctor Rebecca Mancuso.

Rebecca Mancuso:

[inaudible 00:03:27] Hi, everybody. Thank you. I want to thank the CAC for hosting this lecture and for highlighting local history. We have really interesting local history in Northwest Ohio. I was born in Bowling Green, Ohio and grew up here. Went to Bowling Green State University. Studied French and history and then decided to get a master's degree in history. So, I went to Bowling Green State University. Then I really wanted to get out of Bowling Green. So, since I was interested in Canada, which has nothing to do with this talk at all, I decided to go to McGill University in Montreal.

Rebecca Mancuso:

I loved Montreal. Lived there for a number of years. Then worked for a few years in Chicago. When a job opened up that called for someone, an academic job, they wanted someone with the expertise in Canada, it was in Bowling Green, Ohio. So, I came all the way back here. I've been fascinated by the fingers all my life. They were on display when I left Bowling Green and on display when I came back. So, we're going to talk about this fascinating artifact that belongs to the Wood County Historical Society today. So, thank you for joining me for The Finger Saga.

Rebecca Mancuso:

When I came back to Bowling Green in the mid 2000s, in a couple of years I decided to join the Board of Directors at the Wood County Historical Society. I was on the board off and on from about 2009 to 2016 or '17. What I'm going to talk about today came from conversations I had with the former director of the museum, Dana Nemeth, who's here, and the current director, Kelli Kling, who's here, and the present curator, Holly Hartlerode Kirkendall, who couldn't make it today. I had wonderful conversations with them, with members of the board, with members of the society, community members, like Mike [inaudible 00:05:32] and other people like that, about ethical issues surrounding the exhibition of human remains.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, what I'm going to present today were some research I did, some ideas that I came up with, but I do want to explain that I am no longer on the board. I don't speak for the museum. It is the museum that makes all the decisions surrounding what artifacts to keep, what to dispose of or sell, and all of those things. So, this just comes from my experience several years ago. So, if you lived in BG, if you were here before 2014, how many of you have seen the fingers? Overwhelming. Yep. Bowling Green folks cherish the fingers. Where did you see them? Did you see them in the courthouse, or did you see them ... Yeah. You remember them in the courthouse. So do I. Going in there, begging my parents to walk me through so I could look at the fingers.

Speaker 4:

[inaudible 00:06:24]

Rebecca Mancuso:

Yeah. Did anybody see them when they were in the museum? A few of you have. Yeah. So, if you saw them in the courthouse, what was your reaction when you saw them? How did they make you feel? What was your response?

Speaker 3:

I was young and I just thought it was wonderful. A friend of mine, whenever we could get over to the courthouse, race up those steps and look at the fingers.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Look at the fingers.

Speaker 3:

We didn't put it in context of anything. It was just ...

Rebecca Mancuso:

Exactly. Right. Okay. Anybody else? Yeah?

Speaker 5:

Well, the display case was right at the top of the stairway. So, when folks came from the county seat to pay their taxes, and, in those days, some of them came to pay cash ... Mike would know that. They would make sure that they paid. You write them out. But when they went by that display case, they felt a little guilty. They said, "Well, I better do things right. These people around here [inaudible 00:07:23]."

Rebecca Mancuso:

Are pretty serious, right. Right. Okay. So, they kind of had a place of honor in the courthouse, didn't they?

Speaker 5:

Yes.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Yeah. So, you saw these fingers. There was kind of a spooky or gross out reaction to them. Did you learn anything about whom they belonged to? No. Didn't learn any of that, right? When the exhibit that was in the courthouse moved to the Wood County Historical Museum, it stayed in the same case that they were in. So, there was still really no interpretation about the woman that they belonged to. So, we want to bring some humanity back for her. Okay.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, here is the Wood County Historical Society and Museum. It was the site of the Wood County Poor Farm, the place where the elderly and the infirm, people with disabilities, would go there to live, built in 1869. In 1885, a lunatic house was added to the property for the county insane. It fell into disrepair but was reopened in 1975 as a museum. The fingers came to the Wood County Historical Society around 1980. All right? So, the museum has an eclectic collection of all kinds of things, but in the last few years, the museum has really changed its focus from kind of general Ohio history, and it's still a big part of it, but the museum has been trying to connect with the history of the site, which is really, really rich.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, the history is focusing on social justice, social welfare, marginalized, vulnerable people. What was it like to be poor in Wood County? What was it like to be a woman in Wood County? Elderly or disabled and so forth. Mentally ill. So, when we talk about the fingers, we can think about fitting them into that context. Okay? So, what we are talking about is the artifact that is owned by Historical Society, three preserved fingers of a murder victim who was killed in 1881,

Mary Bach. So, these fingers are now about, by my calculation, let me think, about 138 years old. Okay.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, I mentioned that they were moved from the courthouse. They'd been in the courthouse since 1897, I think, and then to the Historical Society in 1980, and then taken off exhibit in 2014. I had fascinating conversations with the staff at the Wood County Historical Society, and, again, membership and board members, and a lot of us were disturbed by how the fingers were presented. Right? They were presented in kind of a dehumanized way, a disturbing way. When people looked at them, it tended to elicit a gross out reaction. The way they had been displayed didn't mitigate these kinds of unsympathetic responses. So, some of us, especially the women I talked to, were disturbed that the woman's humanity was gone.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, we were having these conversations. I started to think about some other questions, and so was the staff. So, this wasn't entirely my idea, of course. We're all talking about what we should do with the fingers. So, I thought I would do some research into this. I would look at the legalities and the ethics surrounding the exhibition of human remains. So, here are the research questions that I started looking at. Do we have the right to look at human remains? Should we look at them? If we're going to look at them, can we do so ethically? Can we do so in a pedagogically responsible way? Well, we shall see.

Rebecca Mancuso:

My purpose for this was to create a roadmap. Not really for our museum, because our director, curator were working on that. I was talking with them about it. But I wanted to write about it so that I could get this out in the ... The publication eventually came out in the Public Historian Journal to serve as, maybe, a guide for other museums who might be struggling with these kinds of provocative, controversial artifacts. So, some additional concerns. I just want to mention really quickly that the fingers are not owned by the county. They're owned by the Wood County Historical Society. Again, the curator can decide whether to display them or not, what to do with them, whether to dispose of them, I suppose.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Because the fingers are owned by the society, it's responsible to talk to the membership in the Historical Society. It's responsible to talk to the board, get some feedback. So, there are committees, collections committees and so forth, that were also talking about this issue. As we talked about, right when we got started, the fingers are strangely cherished in Bowling Green. They are connected to what people see as a very important series of events in this town and county. So, when we did talk to members, we talked to people in the community about the fingers, they wanted them to be on display again. They wanted the museum to keep these.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Then we get into the practical stuff. Okay? The fingers do bring people in the door. I can tell you that human remains are among the most popular artifacts in museums the world over. In fact, the leading tourist attraction in the world right now is called Body Worlds. Has anybody seen Body Worlds? Do you know what Body Worlds are? Yeah. Okay. Body Worlds, there are several versions of Body Worlds. They are cadavers that have the skin taken off. They are plasticized. So, they are preserved. Go ahead and look it up. They're playing tennis and they're playing the guitar. They're doing all of the things. People just go nuts for Body Worlds.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, if a museum has human remains, it can be a real attraction. So, we had to keep that in mind. People would come to the museum and say, "We want to see the fingers. That's why we're here." So, we thought, "Well, if the fingers are that attractive, if they're that provocative, they could be an entry point into some conversations about meaningful things." So, to come back up here for a moment, do we have the right to look at human remains? Yes, we do. Certainly there are all these laws surrounding the disposal of bodies and things like that. The law says once a body part is disconnected from a body, and especially if it is altered somehow by being encased in something or placed in fluid in a jar, if it is incorporated into jewelry or artwork, it's not human remains anymore. It's an object.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, the fingers are an object. Problem solved, right? We can put them on display. Well, no. There are all these other kinds of ethical things to think about. People do want to see them, right? So, what kind of tourism is this? Here's another concern that we had at the museum. Wood County Historical Society is identified online, in some quarters, as what's called a dark site. A dark site is an historical society that is associated with atrocity, disaster, deviance, crime, something like that. They're not all disreputable sites. Auschwitz is a dark site. The other Holocaust museums are considered dark sites. The memorial for 9/11 is a dark site. One of the most popular ones now is Chernobyl. Everybody's flocking to Chernobyl to go in there and look around. It's not really interpreted. I think it's kind of dangerous. They're going there nonetheless.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, it was a little bit disturbing when I looked online and I saw that when the fingers were mentioned, they were mentioned in a really lurid, kind of gruesome way. Look at this one from [Weird US 00:15:50]. "If you'd like to see these gruesome reminders of what might happen if you don't complete your housework, you could go to the museum and see these on display." So, it makes a joke of it. People do chuckle about the fingers, which is okay. But when you think about it, that's really pretty much what happened to Mary Bach. She didn't want to do her housework. She was disobedient. She died for it. There you see a caricature of the fingers in the jar.

Rebecca Mancuso:

How about the [Morbid Sightseer 00:16:19]? This one was disturbing. "Why stop in Bowling Green? Why, to see the fingers of Mary Bach, of course. The prized display, three hooked human fingers in a jar. The fingers belonged to Mary Bach, who was murdered. The knife used to sever the fingers and the noose used to hang the man who severed them are proudly presented alongside the popular tater tot-like appendages." Yeah. I couldn't believe how many comparisons to food I saw online. They were either french fries or carrots or things like that. Yeah. Makes some people chuckle but it's also really pretty dehumanizing, right? Yeah. So, those are the kinds of ways that the fingers were mentioned.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, what, I think, was the aim here was to figure out a way to change the public's gaze, shift the public's gaze, and move understandings or reactions from what we call an object centered one to an object driven one. An object centered view of an artifact is where you just look at that artifact and you focus entirely on its physical qualities. "Oh, look at these shriveled fingers. They're dark colored. They're gory." You look at the jar and have just this reaction to the physical qualities. An object driven approach, on the other hand, is, as material historians say,

when you let the object speak. You help the object tell its story. You give it context. You let people engage with the object and the context. That way, you can really build knowledge and educate. It's not just a thing. It's what the thing represents, what the thing symbolizes, the whole story behind it.

Rebecca Mancuso:

I remember talking to Dana Nemeth about this, the former director, one day, and we were talking about the story of Mary Bach. We said, "Once you know the story of Mary Bach, you never see the fingers in the same way. The fuller the story, the better." I'm going to give you an abbreviated version, but let's, for a minute, talk about Mary Myer and Carl Bach. So, Charles Bach and Mary Myer were both German immigrants. They met in Northern Ohio in the Cleveland area. They were married in the late 1860s. They soon moved to Northwest Ohio and settled on a farm in Milton Township, just west of Bowling Green, of course. They had three children, Charles, or Carl Junior, Marie, and [Catherine 00:18:55].

Rebecca Mancuso:

Significantly, the Bachs purchased their farmland jointly. Mary had some inheritance, some from her father and then some from a previous marriage. She had been married to a Civil War soldier, who completely disappeared, was presumed dead. So, she inherited some money from that, as well. So, she came into the marriage with some money, purchased this land jointly with her husband. Her name, her signature, was required for any deed of sale of the land. This would become a major source of tension for the couple. The United States was in a depression in the 1870s. The Bach family slid into poverty during that time. By 1880, the family was deep in debt. Carl desired to sell the land and, perhaps, move west. With or without Mary, we're not sure. We think, possibly, without her. He may have wanted to take the children. We don't know how she felt about that. But we do know that Mary did not want to sell her land. She didn't want to discharge this asset that she had.

Rebecca Mancuso:

At least twice, Carl Bach found buyers for the land, but each time she refused to sign the deed. The newspapers that you read from the 1880s say that Mary was pretty assertive. She was pretty stubborn. So, Carl would find a buyer for the land and she'd just say, "No, I'm not signing this." When you look at the trial transcripts, however, and you look at the testimony from her son, Carl Junior, he said that Carl Bach, the husband, would beat Mary on the head and face until she agreed to sell the land. When he would put the deed in front of her, she would, again, refuse to sign. The newspapers say, "Oh, this happened a couple of times." In the trial transcript, it says it happened five to six times. So, we know that Mary was pretty heavily abused.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Carl became increasingly frustrated with his wife's refusal to sell the land and other behaviors of hers. He began to wander around the neighborhood telling his neighbors that he wanted to kill Mary, that he wanted to hit her with an ax or a knife or whatever it might be. By 1881, Mary was pregnant again. The sources describe her in an advanced state of pregnancy. She complained that Carl's rages drove her from the house "day and night in all kinds of weather." She retained a peace warrant, which is like a restraining order, against Carl. He had to go to jail for about 18 days. Some of his neighbors came and eventually let him out.

Rebecca Mancuso:

He returned to the family home and he stayed on the property, but Mary refused to give him admittance into the house. He stayed in the barn, living and cooking out there. As the weather became colder and colder into October, he became more angry that he was not allowed in the house. Of course, he was angry that his wife was defying him. Mary, meanwhile, took steps to secure a divorce. Carl's living situation and Mary's behavior threw him into such a rage that on October 10th of 1881, he followed through on his threat to kill Mary. He went into the house to say that he was going to stay in the house that night. I'm kind of abbreviating here. He began to argue fiercely with Mary. He ran out of the house, and he said that a corn knife came into his hand somehow, and he ran back into the home and proceeded to attack Mary, who was resting in bed with their six-year-old child. We don't know how the six-year-old child escaped the blows, but, thankfully, she did.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Carl Bach proceeded to deal his wife 41 slashes. The son, Carl Junior, did run to the door of the bedroom to see what the commotion was. He saw his father holding onto Mary's arm and slashing her with the corn knife. Mary tried to grab the window. She tried to run through the room, but he did not let go of her. The son was described as stupefied with horror, of course, at what he saw. Mary's fingers, three fingers ... Her upper body was, they said, nearly unrecognizable after the murder. Three of her fingers were severed, possibly, in a defensive gesture. We don't know. They were separated from her body at that point. The family stayed in the home that night. Early in the morning around 5:00, Carl Bach took his children to a neighbor's house, left them there, and then proceeded to walk to Bowling Green, where he turned himself in to Sheriff [Reed 00:23:35].

Rebecca Mancuso:

Sheriff Reed, initially, didn't believe Carl's confession, saying, "Oh, come on. You probably didn't do anything that bad." Carl said, "No, you need to come to the house to see this situation." So, Sheriff Reed and the coroner, Mister [Abbott 00:23:50], went to the Bach home and, indeed, discovered the body. At that point, the Sheriff collected evidence, which has become part of the Bach collection that we have now, the bloody sheet that has not survived, the corn knife, and the three fingers, which the sheriff put in a jar and covered with liquid. According to the documents, alcohol. The local lore is that it's whiskey. Right? We're not quite sure. We do know that Carl probably did drink. There was probably alcohol in the house. The trial transcripts say that both Carl and Mary did drink on occasion, or maybe more than on occasion. We're not sure.

Rebecca Mancuso:

The sheriff placed the fingers in the jar with the liquid and took those, too, as evidence. The case immediately became a sensation. "The most shocking butchery ever known in the history of the county." Carl was tried twice, once in 1881, but there was an irregular jury selection. So, he had to wait to be tried again in 1883. He was condemned to hang in 1883. That, again, was a sensation. Newspapers say that up to 20,000 people came to watch Carl be hanged. In fact, they couldn't really see him. He was in an enclosure. One wonders if that's an exaggeration. Could 20,000 people really fit in downtown Bowling Green? I don't know. But it was the same week as the county fair. So, there were a lot of people in the area who wanted to see this.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Right after the hanging, the gallows were taken to the county fair to be put on display. So, very early on, a lot of these artifacts were displayed publicly. The corn knife and other evidence, the

fingers, the sheet were all displayed in court first and then became part of an exhibit that I'll show you here in a few minutes. So, newspaper coverage in 1881 shows some sympathy for Mary. The newspaper said, just summarizing here, that she was "an assertive woman," "a thickset though not bad looking woman." They mention her pregnancy. They mention that she was a victim of a brutal attack. They say that these poor children had been robbed of a mother. They mention that the child was in bed with the mother when this happened, and these kinds of things.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Jumping ahead though, by 1883, already, the discourse shifted. So, it didn't take a lot of time for attitudes toward Mary to change. Each time Carl Bach went to trial, and then when he was hanged and everything, each time the local media got to revisit the case, right after the murder, the first trial, the second trial, then the hanging ... Each time the discussions of Mary and Carl Bach, the husband, changed. By 1883, Mary was described as a lazy animal, filthy at times, slothful, disobedient, and that she neglected her wifely duties, which could mean a lot of things. Carl, too. He was called a maniac. He was called depraved. He was also referred to as a pitiable man and a poor victim, whose wife was more of a curse to him than anything.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Now, a lot of these descriptions of Mary come from the trial transcript. They come from Carl Bach, the perpetrator's testimony that is in the court transcript. In some of the newspaper articles they will say, "This is Carl Bach's testimony. He's talking about his wife." Other times they just pull things from Carl Bach's testimony and report on what Mary must have been like, using Carl's words. They don't attribute these words to Carl. So, she's called all of these things in the newspaper, and we don't know that those were Carl's words. A reporter for the Wood County Democrat wrote in 1883 that, "While a man should protect his wife, the fault, maybe, was partly on both sides."

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, this narrative of the blameworthy wife had started to take hold. It would be remarkably persistent. I talked to Dana, the former director of the museum, and she told me that ... You could tell me I'm lying if you want to. She did tell me that when she became a tour guide in the museum, it was in the '80s.

Dana Nemeth:

The late '80s.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Late '80s. You were told that you could suggest when you were giving a tour that Mary Bach's baby was not necessarily Carl's baby, and that she was most likely unfaithful to Bach. I'm looking through all the documents. I don't really see any suggestions of that. That's how persistent that was. Mary, of course, was silenced. She couldn't say anything.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, I think I went over this, didn't I? First shown in the courtroom. Here is the exhibit, the Wood County Courthouse exhibit from 1897 to about 2012, I believe. This is what it looked like. It moved to the Wood County Historical Society in 1980, but it was left just like this, and was left just like this until 2012. The current curator just dismantled it, and still put a few of these things

on display but in a more tasteful way with a white background. You look at this and you see ... It's a little hard to see, I know. Here's the corn knife right here. For some of you, this will be really familiar. There's a noose and the hood Carl Bach wore, photos of Carl Bach, his pipe, his Bible. This right down here that you can't see, that's just the top of the jar where Mary's fingers were. So, who does this focus on? Who's the center of this exhibit? It focuses all on the perpetrator, Carl Bach.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, what choices, really, did the museum have? The museum could bury the remains. I mentioned that the fingers are cherished here in Bowling Green. There have been just a couple of objections, I think, maybe, two or three letters over the last decade and a half, where some people have said, "Hey, maybe we could consider burying these remains." Another letter from 2015 said, "Hey, we really do need to stop treating Mary Bach's remains like some kind of sideshow oddity." It's not a lot of objection, but we needed to listen to that. It spoke to people at the museum. "Yeah, we've got to change this."

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, they could retain them but not exhibit them, and then exhibit them in this new social welfare context that the museum is really exploring now. So, I think you can kind of guess that I'm believing in this direction. That starts to be the direction I'm beginning to go in. So, if they are going to be exhibited, what would the best practices be? Well, you have to contact multiple stakeholders. We talked about the society membership, getting their input. Community groups. We talked about bringing in women's groups. Advocacy groups in the community. Perhaps contacting family members of the Bach family. I talked to the present curator about this. She's being very cautious about that. She doesn't want to contact living members of the Bach family just right out of the blue, saying, "We've got these fingers." So, that's got to be done carefully. She says she's talking to the board to consider how to do that.

Rebecca Mancuso:

One thing I did though was to do some comparative work. Again, I'm writing to talk to other museum professionals about how to handle these kinds of controversial artifacts. So, I started talking to other museum professionals about what they had done. The Bach case is pretty unique. A lot of museums have human remains, as I've said. When they have them, those curios in the jars, they don't want to get rid of them. What's different about Mary Bach? Well, one big thing, big ethical issue, is that we know who she was. The fingers can be connected to a human being. They're not anonymous. A lot of the human remains in museums are completely anonymous. You don't know whose brain it is, or whose tumor that is, or whatever it might be. That's not the case with Mary.

Rebecca Mancuso:

The consent issue is, of course, a big one, too. Mary would probably not have consented to this. So, we think about whether we would want our loved one's remains on display. So, those are some big differences. The American Alliance of Museums says that it is acceptable to exhibit human remains if it's done in an educationally responsible way. Well, okay. What does that mean? So, I started talking to people. That's the best thing I could do. I talked to some staff members from the Holocaust Memorial Museum when I went to the National Council on Public History Conference. Their issue was human hair. Is human hair a human remain? No, because if you go to the salon, you don't have to take the hair and bury it or anything like that. So, it's not considered human remains.

Rebecca Mancuso:

However, when we talk about how the hair that appears in Holocaust museums was obtained, it was obtained under horrific circumstances, right? It was forcibly removed from people. So, even though it's not human remains, it's human material and it's fraught with a lot of horror and so forth. There have been objections from among the Jewish community when museums put hair on display. Talking to the memorial museum staff members, some of them said, "No, we don't think it's quite right to have it on display." In the US, in Washington DC, they don't have it on display now. I think they have some pictures but they don't have the real hair on display. In Europe, some places do. According to these staff members, they said, "So, seeing the hair gives you a horrified reaction. That's what it's supposed to do. So, that's okay."

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, again, if you think it through, why are we doing this? The [Mütter 00:34:17] Museum, they were very helpful. That's a medical museum. They just have human remains everything. So, they're like, "Yes! Human remains. Interpret them carefully, pedagogically some way, have a lesson here." So, they were all for it. The one that was most inspiring, however, was the head archeologist at Historic Jamestown. His name is William Kelso, Doctor William Kelso. He's a BGSU graduate. He told me that he and his wife are Falcon Flames. So, BGSU kind of gets you in the door. I had a great conversation with him. Really inspiring. He told me about the story of this person. Little different from Mary Bach.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Her name, or the name given to her, is Jane. Jane is not her real name. We don't know her identity. In the course of excavations in Jamestown, the archeologists found the bones of a woman that they were absolutely certain had been cannibalized. Most likely after death. She probably wasn't murdered necessarily for that purpose. She probably died of natural causes. She was cannibalized. They have decided to put her remains on display. You can clearly see where parts of the skull have been cut open so that people could get to the matter inside and all of these things. So, it is disturbing.

Rebecca Mancuso:

What disturbed the archeologists the most was not so much that she'd been cannibalized. Let me explain. These few years were called The Starving Time in 1609, 1610, when everybody in Jamestown was starving. So, it was just something that the other settlers did to Jane after she had passed away. What bothered the archeologists was that she had been thrown on a trash heap with a whole bunch of garbage and human waste and stuff. They thought, "That's just unjust. That's dehumanizing. So, we want to bring Jane's humanity back." So, they had someone reconstruct her facial features. They gave her a name. They told her story. It's really educational. It's disturbing, it's shocking, but Bill Kelso said he just wanted her to live on. He wanted people to know that she was a human being.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, I thought about Mary Bach when he told me that. So, my decision, and, again, this was just the conclusion that I came to. I will tell you it pretty much fit in with what the staff was thinking, too. I have some information from the present curator to tell you about what they want to do with the remains. Again, in talking to the curator about this, she just decided that the fingers can be a really interesting way in to difficult conversations about vulnerable people, about victimhood, about abuse, about death. So, these things are worth looking at, talking about. I talked about the

museum's updated mission here, but we want to put ... They, I should say, are going to put Mary Bach at the center of the story, give her an autonomous place in history.

Rebecca Mancuso:

What was really shocking to me as I continued with this research, I looked at some of the current articles by sociologists and psychologists about domestic abuse and why people abuse. What shocked me was that the constellation of factors surrounding the femicide of Mary Bach, the forces that were present in her life, in her domestic situation, are exactly the same as the factors today that increase a woman's chance of being killed. Look at them. Exactly the same. Financial strain, prior abuse, pregnancy, perpetrator's adherence to strict gender roles, and a woman's attempts to leave the abuser. So, we can connect past to present and really learn from that, I think. That's what the curator's doing. The message, too, that domestic violence happens here and not just somewhere else is also very powerful.

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, Carl Bach will still be in the story, but he won't be the center of the story. Through this exhibit, the museum can speak to all kinds of people. So, yes. I have just a couple more things to say and then we shall wrap up. Let me tell you what the current curator, Holly Hartlerode Kirkendall, says about the fingers and how they will be displayed. They're going to go back on exhibit in May of 2020. She just wrote me recently and she said, "It's known that the object, the fingers, draw in visitors. But the focus will now be on Mary. Mary was a victim of domestic violence. For that reason, her story will be told in the form of a victim impact statement." To help her do this, Holly is partnering with the The Cocoon Shelter here in town.

Rebecca Mancuso:

Carl's items will also be on display, with the intention of using these items as tools to promote conversation surrounding people with violent tendencies. She wants to talk about where Carl could have gone if he lived today. So, to do that, Holly has partnered with the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, the local chapter here, and the Wood County Alcohol Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services. She's going to create brochures to go with the exhibit with information on where people today can get help if they're in a violent situation. The Cocoon is putting together a video with victim impact statements from women and from men. So, the fingers are no longer going to be treated, she says, as, "the sideshow joke in a jar. The seriousness of the issue and its connection to how local communities deal with violence and murder must be told."

Rebecca Mancuso:

So, one more thing. I'm just going to read the final paragraph of my article to give you my feelings about this. This is me narrating, okay? As a child, my mind was haunted by a woman's severed fingers that lay in a remote, dusty case in our county courthouse. But while researching and writing this article, another haunting thought has taken its place. It is the utterance of Carl Bach, who summoned the editor of The Sentinel Tribune Newspaper to his jail cell in 1883, eager to justify his actions to the public one last time before he was hanged. He said, "How melancholy and desperate my wife made my heart and mind when she told me I have nothing more to do with household affairs. But my two oldest children, Carl and Marie, know well enough that their mother was more to blame than their father."

Rebecca Mancuso:

This was printed in the paper. Mary Bach's assertion of her independence, rather than Carl's decision to attack her, had become an accepted explanation for her fate. How often do we still

see such reasoning in the all too frequent femicide cases in our communities? In Wood County, the decision to display the remains is one that might run counter to what other museums have done, but we will move ahead in the hope of dislodging powerful notions that women are responsible, and other people might be responsible for the physical abuse they suffer. Thank you.