

# Oral Histories of Tompkins County

## *Archival Finding Aid*

*The History Center in Tompkins County*  
110 North Tioga St  
Ithaca NY 14850  
607-273-8284  
[www.thehistorycenter.net](http://www.thehistorycenter.net)  
[archives@thehistorycenter.net](mailto:archives@thehistorycenter.net)

### **2019 - Founding Leaders of the Tompkins Center for History & Culture**

The “*Founding Leaders of the Tompkins Center for History & Culture*” collection includes six brief monologues from the leaders and executive directors of the founding organizations included in creation of the Tompkins Center for History & Culture (TCHC). TCHC opened to the public in 2019 at 110 N. Tioga St on the Ithaca Commons. At its founding it included nearly a dozen community partners and organizations: The History Center in Tompkins County, Community Arts Partnership of Tompkins County, Discover Cayuga Lake, The Dorothy Cotton Institute, Tompkins Chamber & Visit Ithaca, Wharton Studio Museum, Discovery Trail, Latino Civic Association, Susan Christopherson Center for Community Planning, Cayuga Chamber Orchestra, Historic Ithaca, the Ithaca Aviation Heritage Foundation, and the Discovery Trail. The building was collaboratively established as a cultural destination and tourism hub for downtown Ithaca, supported through providing affordable office and event space rentals to other local non-profits.

Each monologue is under two minutes and includes each director's thoughts on the future of the collaborative building, and the opportunities they are excited for in regards to their individual organizations. This collection is particularly meaningful as three of the directors left their organizations a year after the founding of TCHC; John Spence, Rod Howe, and Kirby Edmonds. In this way these monologues capture a particular moment in time when the multi-year dream of opening the TCHC had been realized, but the practice of sharing and collaborating in the building was still yet to come.

These files were found stored on The History Center's staff server in 2023, and accessioned into the Oral Histories of Tompkins County - Audio Archives in the fall of 2023.

#### *Interviews with:*

##### **Kirby Edmonds (00:01:07) - *Dorothy Cotton Institute***

Kirby Edmonds (1951-2020) was a lead fellow and co-founder of the Dorothy Cotton Institute, established in 2010. Edmonds monologue refers to the following collaborations with The History Center in Tompkins County: the 2019 Local Sisters of Change Oral History Project held in The History Center archives, and the exhibit ‘Sisters of Change: Unsung Sheroes for Racial Justice Whose Names You Ought to Know’ on display in the atrium tower of the Tompkins Center from

January 2020-June 2021 and then modified to a printed and virtual exhibit distributed by The History Center and Dorothy Cotton Institute.

- *Recorded 2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2019\_Edmonds-Kirby*
- *File format: MOV video file, MP3 audio file*
- *Transcript File: OHTC\_2019\_Edmonds-Kirby\_Transcript*

**Bill Foster (00:00:47) - Discover Cayuga Lake**

Bill Foster worked as the Program Director, and later Executive Director and Director of Educational Programs for Discover Cayuga Lake (DCL) (formerly Cayuga Lake Floating Classroom) since 2014. DCL has been a project of the Center for Transformative Action (which joined the Tompkins Center for History & Culture in 2021) since 2014.

- *Recorded 2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2019\_Foster-Bill*
- *File format: MOV video file, MP3 audio file*
- *Transcript File: OHTC\_2019\_Foster-Bill\_Transcript*

**Rod Howe (00:01:34) - The History Center in Tompkins County**

Rod Howe served as the Executive Director of The History Center in Tompkins County from 2015-2019. Howe was a lead collaborator in bringing many of the original partners of TCHC together to form the building, and through the combined support from the Howe and Nobles families established the permanent Story Vault Exhibit in The History Center Exhibit Hall Space.

- *Recorded 2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2019\_Howe-Rod (TCHC)*
- *File format: MOV video file, MP3 audio file*
- *Transcript File: OHTC\_2019\_Howe-Rod (TCHC)\_Transcript*

**Diana Riesman (00:01:54) - Wharton Studio Museum**

Diana Riesman co-founded and served as the Executive Director of the Wharton Studio Museum since 2009. The Wharton Studio Museum was established to highlight, recognize, and preserve the history of Ithaca's involvement in the silent film industry in the 19-teens.

- *Recorded 2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2019\_Riesman-Diana*
- *File format: MOV video file, MP3 audio file*
- *Transcript File: OHTC\_2019\_Riesman-Diana\_Transcript*

**John Spence (00:01:49) - Community Arts Partnership of Tompkins County**

John Spence (1952-2022) served as the Executive Director of the Community Arts Partnership of Tompkins County from 2014-2020. Community Arts Partnership established the CAP ArtSpace Gallery on the first floor as a local artist exhibit and events space.

- *Recorded 2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2019\_Spence-John*

- *File format: MOV video file, MP3 audio file*
- *Transcript File: OHTC\_2019\_Spence-John\_Transcript*

**Jennifer Tavares (00:01:55) - *Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce (Tompkins Chamber)***

Jennifer Tavares was hired as the President & CEO of the Tompkins County Chamber of Commerce in 2014. Tavares' monologue discusses the Downtown Visitors Center located on the first floor of TCHC which included a gift shop stocking items from multiple building partners.

- *Recorded 2019*
- *Audio File: OHTC\_2019\_Tavares-Jennifer*
- *File format: MOV video file, MP3 audio file*
- *Transcript File: OHTC\_2019\_Tavares-Jennifer\_Transcript*

***CITATION FOR THE COLLECTION***

*"Founding Leaders of the Tompkins Center for History & Culture"* Oral History Project, 6 monologues recorded in 2019, The History Center in Tompkins County. Oral Histories of Tompkins County Audio Archives, Ithaca NY, 2023.