

**KM-6**

**CHARLES FISHER**

**BIRTH DATE: JUNE 11<sup>th</sup>, 1911**

**INTERVIEW DATE: DECEMBER 5<sup>th</sup>, 1993**

**RUNNING TIME: 25:57**

**INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE**

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**INTERVIEW LOCATION: COLDWATER, MICHIGAN**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: CATHERINE ROUNTREE, 6/2011**

**REVISIONS BY:**

**NETHERLANDS, 1912**

**AGE: 9 MONTHS**

**SHIP: RYNDAM**

**PORT: ROTTERDAM, HOLLAND**

**RESIDENCES:**

**HOLLAND: ARUM**

**UNITED STATES: MARTINSVILLE, INDIANA**

MOORE: This is Kate Moore from the National Park Service. Today is the fifth of December, 1993. And I'm in Coldwater, Michigan at the home of Charles Fisher, who came from the Netherlands in 1912 when he was nine months old. Why don't you begin by giving me your full name and date of birth please?

FISHER: Charles Fisher. Born June 11, 1911.

MOORE: And how do you spell Fisher then?

FISHER: Fisher. F-I-S-H-E-R. And (inaudible, tape skips and repeats)

MOORE: And what size town was that town?

FISHER: About 1500. Irene asked that.

MOORE: And what was, do you remember anything... you don't remember, have you ever been to that town? Or seen it? You were nine months

FISHER: [interposed] Yeah! What? No, I... I haven't either, have I. No, no. I haven't seen it when I was out in the army, either. No. No, I never been back.

MOORE: And um, what was your father's name?

FISHER: Robert or Ripper. Ripper Fisher or Robert Fisher.

MOORE: And would you spell it in Dutch?

FISHER: R-I-P-P-E-R.

MOORE: And um, what was his occupation?

FISHER: I guess he's farmer, I guess. If they had them over.

MOORE: And what did he look like?

FISHER: Oh, he's good looking guy like his son. (laughs) (whistles) Put that in there. 'Bout 5 foot 10 and weighted 170 pounds, something like that. Smart. Smart as a whip. He's a soldier, so must be good for military.

MOORE: And um, what was his personality and temperament like?

FISHER: He's good if he had it his own way.

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MOORE: Hold for a second. (tape scuffles) And his personality or temperament, how would you describe it?

FISHER: He's kind, kind hearted guy. And uh, but he liked to have his own way... (inaudible whispering)

MOORE: And is there a story about your father that you, you remember? That people tell? Anything that characterizes them?

FISHER: Prohibitionist. He didn't like liquor of any sort, no. He wouldn't even like Coca-Cola probably. He liked the coffee. He liked coffee and coffee at nine o'clock, tea at three o'clock.

MOORE: Hot chocolate?

FISHER: No.

MOORE: And uh, how about your mother's name? What was your mother's name?

FISHER: Her name was Battjia. B-A-T-T-J-I-A, I think. Fisher.

MOORE: Fisher?

FISHER: Andela.

MOORE: Her maiden name was Andela?

FISHER: Andela.

MOORE: How do you spell that?

FISHER: A-N-D-E-L-A.

MOORE: And uh, what did she do for a living?

FISHER: Took care of fourteen kids.

MOORE: And what did she look like? How would you describe her?

FISHER: Ooh, she's always in the kitchen. She's nice looking girl, you know, woman. And, I think brown, brown hair I would say. Always busy. Always willing to help if she had the time, you know.

MOORE: Was she tall or...

FISHER: No, she's short. Sh... short and stubby, I guess.

MOORE: And her personality?

FISHER: Good, fine, something like that. Somebody I know...

MOORE: And her, her chores around the house, taking care of the children and what else?

FISHER: What, what she'd do around the?

MOORE: Yeah.

FISHER: Well she'd cook for them, clean house, that's about all the time she had.

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MOORE: If you could tell a story about your mother that you most appreciate, what would you tell?

FISHER: She... I'd have to make it up, I guess. (laughs) Nothing I knew... just from memory. Just a good person apparently. She had to be.

MOORE: And how about all your brothers and sisters? How many did you? You said fourteen.

FISHER: Fourteen.

MOORE: And could you name them please.

FISHER: Oh yeah. Uh, I might get the first four or five mixed. There's Joe, Garrett, Irene, Otto, John, Alice, Frances, Elizabeth, Sadie, and Robert, and Leo, and Charles. Did I miss one of you? There's fourteen of them.

MOORE: Good. And what about your house on, did you, what do you remember, you obviously came over here at nine months. What did you hear about your house before that was in Holland?

FISHER: Uh...

MOORE: What did they tell about your house, when you

FISHER: [interposed] I think the same house that Irene told you about. There's, their new house is kind of a row house, I guess you'd call it nowadays, probably.

MOORE: Mmm.

FISHER: Kitchen, a dining room, and plenty of bedrooms.

MOORE: And uh, we can... about the things, about what you remember about your house we'll move on because we have Irene's account.

FISHER: Yeah and um...

MOORE: Uh... and since you didn't remember it.

FISHER: I didn't need the house. (laughs)

MOORE: What, what did your family tell you about their experiences on the boat? Other... your parents, or experiences coming here, or why they came here?

FISHER: Well they came here because we were, we were starving in Holland. We just had not enough to eat. Dad worked for oh, he peddled milk. I know he did it with a go cart. And he's a farmer, and... he's a soldier. He must have done about everything.

MOORE: And, did they ever, how did they tell, what did they tell you about their journey? And what happened to them? Did they talk about it very much?

FISHER: No. No. No, just same thing Irene told you. We go to the restroom and then [not understood]. Guess that was embarrassing to them, but didn't know them. That was [not understood]. (laughs)

MOORE: What about um, your life at home with your parents, how did your parents feel about living in America?

FISHER: Oh, they thought was great. Oh yes. Soon as we... Let's see, we left Hoboken to go to Philadelphia guess, then to Martinsville. Even Martinsville had nothing that, you know, that they were used to. But it was much better than what they had in Holland.

MOORE: Did they say this to you when you were children? Did they express this to you?

FISHER: I just heard a lot. Heard, heard hearsay.

MOORE: Yeah.

FISHER: No, they wouldn't...

MOORE: And, and....

FISHER: I was only eight months, a year old. They didn't do a talk

MOORE: [interposed] You were only about a year old when you came.

FISHER: They didn't talk much to me about it.

MOORE: Well um... go on to the same... um, do you think that the expectations of your parents were fulfilled in America?

FISHER: [not understood]

MOORE: Were, were filled, do they, they came when they wanted to?

FISHER: Oooh. Goodness, yes. Yes. Dad wanted to do that for years. He wrote to the farms in Oregon and Washington and up in Canada to get a hold for

the mother, dad, and dozen kids. And, what... In Iowa there's pretty close, moving to Iowa and what's.

MOORE: And, what's the first memory that you have? Uh...

FISHER: Of Coldwater?

MOORE: No, uh, your childhood, what's the first one?

FISHER: [interposed] Cold, Coldwater, Michigan.

MOORE: Coldwater. Coldwater, since you were the youngest.

FISHER: [interposed] We had a, uh... Either Milford or Nappanee, I can remember the house, just had a porch all the way around it. That's all. Then, we moved to Coldwater in '17. March. The war started in '18. And I started school in '17.

MOORE: In 1917, you started school. Now what language do you speak at home?

FISHER: I 'pose to talk Frisian. That's what I said. I had to learn to speak Frisian with my folks and speak English with the teachers. I was a smart guy, wasn't I?

MOORE: (laughs) And do you remember, you spoke first uh, Frisian?

FISHER: Only Frisian, ...my folks didn't understand English, you know.

MOORE: So at you spoke at home and played with the children in Frisian?

FISHER: That's right.

MOORE: When did you learn English?

FISHER: Same time I learned Frisian, I suppose.

MOORE: With your.... with whom did you speak English then?

FISHER: My brothers.

MOORE: Oh, so they spoke English.

FISHER: My brothers. And my first grade teacher, Mrs. Goody. Back in 1917.

MOORE: So um, did you have any difficulty learning English at all?

FISHER: No. I didn't learn better.

MOORE: Do you have any stories about them? Anybody making fun of you for speaking Frisian?

FISHER: Ah, I don't know of... mmm.

MOORE: So you never were in any way singled out?

FISHER: We were just... we were just good hearted guys.

MOORE: And then you didn't remember your sister Beth said they made her sing songs in, in Dutch? Did they ever ask anything like that of you?

FISHER: Nah. They didn't, but Irene said they sang Dutch in school. But not us. We, ours a big school. Ours had six rooms, six grades, you know. Well at least 30, 40 people in the room.

MOORE: Did you have any other friends at school that were from your region or were from Holland? The Netherlands? Did you any friends, children who were Dutch?

FISHER: No. No.

MOORE: You didn't?

FISHER: Well, uh, we had a baker in town. Oh, but he [not understood] But they were, they were Dutch. And I couldn't to Dutch because I can't talk Dutch. I talk Frisian. So, I couldn't talk to (name) and he couldn't talk to me either.

MOORE: How about your parents? Did they talk to the baker?

FISHER: Oh yeah. They could speak with him too. Because see in Holland, you go to school, you learn Dutch. And you come home, you speak Frisian. So if you go to school there, you can talk Dutch. Otherwise, you're just [not understood].

MOORE: (laughs) Now when you were a child, did you... Was your family religious at all?

FISHER: No.

MOORE: And uh, you grew up your whole, most of your life in Coldwater, is that true?

FISHER: Mmm. 17. I don't know, 8, over 8 years of it.

MOORE: And um, when you're a child what did you do for entertainment at home?

FISHER: (laughs) Well, crazy games and... uh... played with the neighbors I suppose. Well, we had neighbors in town. The Flagga family. I remember them very well.

MOORE: Were most of the other children in town immigrant children or were they?

FISHER: We didn't have any. We were the only ones in Coldwater.

MOORE: You were the only immigrants in Coldwater? What about, uh, wasn't the Vandykes, they didn't live, the Vandyke family didn't live in Coldwater, did they?

FISHER: Well, they lived, close to my dad.

MOORE: And they were immigrants too.

FISHER: [interposed] But, they're from Holland too. They didn't, move to Coldwater 'til they're married.

MOORE: So basically you're the only immigrant children?

FISHER: [interposed] Oh yeah.

MOORE: And did you feel different from other children?

FISHER: No.

MOORE: No?

FISHER: I was just as smart as anybody.

MOORE: (laughs) So um, do you think that your family, your family members adjusted to life here quickly?

FISHER: Beautifully. Beautifully.

MOORE: What about your

FISHER: [interposed] I remember... The war started in '17 and over in '18. And had a big celebration there in '18. And, then Armistice Day in '18. And as a kid, my dad was out blowing three horns. Everybody blew horns. Toot, you know, victory's over. Never forget that.

MOORE: And that, how old were you then?

FISHER: 7.

MOORE: 7 years old?

FISHER: Mmm.

MOORE: And um, um... What about the fact that your parents didn't speak English? Do you think that, limited their social life or?

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FISHER: Oh well, they, sure did. But they didn't, they didn't care for social life. They were, they had a family to raise and a lot of work. That's, that farm was 365 acres. We didn't have a tractor, all horses. And 18 horses and 83 or so cows.

MOORE: Well. How did he do business if he didn't speak English, your father? I mean, how did he manage?

FISHER: My, my... my brothers. My dad and mother never went down town really.

MOORE: So basically your, your...

FISHER: [interposed] My brother, Garrett, and Otto, and John, and Pete, and Irene, and Janet. They all did the business for them.

MOORE: So they did the public relations for your parents?

FISHER: That is correct. That's a good way... mmm.

MOORE: And your parents ran the show?

FISHER: Yeah.

MOORE: So your father basically was, world was the farm?

FISHER: Mmm.

MOORE: And working that. So if he needed contact...

FISHER: Big. Big dairy man.

MOORE: Yeah. And uh, was he always in dairy?

FISHER: Yeah, I guess he was somehow 'cause they lived there four years and we go on a farm on Grand Street. And... I lived there twenty five years myself. And if there's a ninety acre farm, 40 tillable, 50 pasture. He was dairy man all the time.

MOORE: And what was your house like? Describe your farmhouse you lived in Coldwater.

FISHER: Oh, the first one? That's a fabulous one. That's a six bedrooms and bath. That's...

MOORE: Which one was that?

FISHER: Out on the big farm. Yes, my mother thought it was heaven, you know.

MOORE: Running water?

FISHER: Running water. Bathroom! Yeah...

MOORE: Inside?

FISHER: Inside.

MOORE: Plumbing?

FISHER: Plumbing.

MOORE: What about lights?

FISHER: [not understood]

MOORE: And it, was it lit by, what type of lighting was it?

FISHER: Electric, that's right. Oooh, that's right down town I 'pose. The farm's right down town, now. Do you know where our career center is? You probably don't. That used to be our 365 acre farm. It's a school now.

MOORE: And what do you remember from those days?

FISHER: Uh, must have been awfully good memories. Used to, milk the cows this way after

MOORE: [interposed] By hand?

FISHER: No. By machine. But this... we'd run the milk over. Cool it, just a, just a circular cooler with cap on the bottom of my hand. To move it, now, had to, had to, had to have gloves on. And glass nodules, half pints, and pints, and quarts.

MOORE: Did you homogenize the milk?

FISHER: No, no, no, no. No one know no word. No one, no one know. We had three white wagons, milk wagons. And the horses knew where to go. And the horses knew where to stop.

MOORE: (laughs)

FISHER: That's true.

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MOORE: And wh, wha, did you work on the farm? [not understood] yourself?

FISHER: Correct.

MOORE: Not much?

FISHER: See, I was only... seven. Ten or eleven when I left. The big farm. Oh the big farm? The other farm? No, I, ah, I was a spoiled brat.

MOORE: Alright so, this big farm, you left when you were about 11 years old?

FISHER: Mmm.

MOORE: And went to Coldwater. And that's when your dad bought his own farm right? The small one?

FISHER: Yeah. Just about, about half a mile west of the big farm. Our house is, still stands. Our house still stands. The old house.

MOORE: And who lives in that old house? Anybody in the family?

FISHER: No, no, no, no. They had a fire in it, and it, it should be torn down. Shredded it. It looks [not understood] in Coldwater.

MOORE: Alright.

FISHER: So it, ah, burnt down.

MOORE: So, you um, that, that, that little farm your father had, how many acres was that about?

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FISHER: 90. 90. 40 acres tilled, 50 acres of pasture.

MOORE: That was the small farm now we're talking?

FISHER: [interposed] Mmm. And we made a living out of that. Yeah, now they got... can't even. They laugh at you now. It's a good garden spot, 40 acres.

MOORE: Mmm.

FISHER: We had good life.

MOORE: What did you, what did you remember best about your childhood in terms... most fondly?

FISHER: Oh, just, just my fine living, that's all.

MOORE: And you're the youngest

FISHER: [interposed] My fine living. I was the youngest.

MOORE: Spoiled?

FISHER: Well, of course, the girls weren't home anymore. They were, were all domestic help.

MOORE: Mmm.

FISHER: Soon as the girls came 16 and got out of school, got a job. And then, another thing they didn't tell ya, when the girl had a job and money, dad made them pay back the 55 dollar passes to America. The girls paid that.

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But the boys didn't have to. 'Cause... 55 bucks it cost to go over. Now, you can get [not understood] that to Detroit. (laughs)

MOORE: Um... what, did you have any family tragedies that occurred during the time that you were um...

FISHER: No, just Pete's drowning. My brother drowned.

MOORE: And he was saving someone's life, they said.

FISHER: He was saving two boys' lives and he got them to shore. And... my brother was living. And he couldn't find Pete. And Pete was on the bottom

MOORE: Oh.

FISHER: So he, got in the row boat and took the boat to the bridge. That's just a year, couple days after he got married.

MOORE: Mmm.

FISHER: Peter drowned... [not understood]

MOORE: Were your parents alive then?

FISHER: Hmm?

MOORE: Were your parents alive?

FISHER: Oh yes. I was just, say so. 'Cause this happened in '27.

MOORE: In 1927. And um, what happened, and uh, you grew up on that farm, and what happened? You went to school? And where, what did you do after that?

FISHER: Well I graduated. And uh... dad think that I ought get some work so I worked at the condensery, creamery. For... couple of summers, guess something like that. Then our neighbor next door had a dairy so I peddled his milk. I started out with a little cherry on a bicycle. Then I got a little costal wagon, pulled that to school. Then after school, I pulled back home.

MOORE: Well, if you look back on your life and you grew up uh, a family that immigrated here, and, and found life here, but they kept some of their old traditions.

FISHER: Mmm.

MOORE: How did, how in any way do you still feel those old country traditions? Or was it? Do you?

FISHER: No, except like tonight, we'll probably have hot chocolate 'cause this Santa Clause tonight in Holland. They always have uh, hot chocolate and marzipan in Holland.

MOORE: On December... So you still, you still keep some of the traditions, some of them?

FISHER: No, if you think of it. If she thinks of it, we'll get cocoa tonight. Yeah.  
[not understood]

MOORE: [interposed] Because today is December fifth?

FISHER: Mmm. December fifth.

MOORE: And did you have the same tr... Santa Clause tradition?

FISHER: No, he comes tonight.

MOORE: He comes tonight. Did he come tonight in your house?

FISHER: No.

MOORE: No?

FISHER: No.

MOORE: So when you came here you adopted the American traditions?

FISHER: No, no. Twenty fifth.

MOORE: What about skating? Did you skate?

FISHER: No. Not with nine months. (laughs)

MOORE: But you said your father was a big skater.

FISHER: Oh yeah, my mother was too 'cause Irene yes....

MOORE: But when they came from Holland here, from the Netherlands here

FISHER: [interposed] 'Cause good skates, have better water.

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MOORE: They didn't, they didn't skate here at all?

FISHER: Oh, nah... where would skate? Roller skate?

MOORE: No. They have skating ponds. Don't they?

FISHER: We don't... or did have. Couldn't pay for either. (laughs)

MOORE: What about... now ok, so then you eventually married. Now how did you meet your wife?

FISHER: Well, we just... (pause) Guess must have known each other. We... not that fast, you now. She wanted to go to a dance with somebody, with a couple. And we went. And, I didn't dance. I still don't dance. She still don't like it. Well, you know that. (laughs)

MOORE: Wait, wait. So you went, you met her at a dance? And you didn't dance then?

FISHER: Yeah.

MOORE: You still don't. But you married her.

FISHER: Well, went to a show, theater. Anyway. Yeah, well at the movie, after that, it just, it didn't go... stayed here and I don't think I even had a car.

MOORE: How old were you then?

FISHER: Oh, 'bout 23 or 24 when I got married.

MOORE: How long did you know each other before you got married?

FISHER: 'Bout 9 months. Very short. Only Hollywood

MOORE: [interposed] Fast worker.

FISHER: Hollywood romances yeah.

(both laugh)

MOORE: And is your wife, um, is your wife the same background? Is she Dutch?

FISHER: No. She's not Dutch. No. She was born in (inaudible location, something Creek?).

MOORE: And her, what is her background?

FISHER: Then she, well her, her mother wasn't well. She died from tb [tuberculosis] before her dad got killed. So she's an orphan. From 1918 on. And he had a shack standing with the south most edge and she, of course, inherited the shack from him. And her grandparents, his father, mother, lived on at Washington, just over here. They moved in with her, then she gradually remodeled the home. She, she's an orphan. Very... alone person. Mmm.

MOORE: And, and when you um, did you have children?

FISHER: Three!

MOORE: Three children?

FISHER: Charles, Norma and Virginia.

MOORE: And what do they do?

FISHER: Norma's in um... Charles in the navy intelligence in Washington D.C. and Norma is a federal mobile in Southfield. Virginia is a librarian at the Quincy just over here, 6 miles.

MOORE: Are they interested in all, at all in your Dutch background? Are they, are they... have you, did you pass anything, back, down to them?

FISHER: No... I will say no. I don't think so.

MOORE: So of all the children in the family, you were the youngest?

FISHER: Mmm.

MOORE: Do you think that you had the, would you say that you had a weaker background in Dutch? By the time it got to you...

FISHER: Oh yeah. Oh goodness yes. Compared to my brothers Garrett and John and Otto, yeah 'cause he knew all about it.

MOORE: But did you ever, you, you went back to Holland?

FISHER: No.

MOORE: You never went back? You said something in the war you were back there.

FISHER: [not understood]

MOORE: Mmm.

FISHER: I was a staff sergeant in Fort Orange, California.

MOORE: Mmm. Were your children ever interested in learning Dutch?

FISHER: Me?

MOORE: Your children?

FISHER: No, I don't think so. Except for Charles knows Latin.

(both laugh)

FISHER: No, I don't... never occurred to them. I don't know...

MOORE: Um, why did you, how did you get in contact with Ellis Island program?  
The Oral history project? How did you get in contact with us?

FISHER: I must have saw it advertised it some place. I wrote them a letter. And,  
wrote them my background. You probably read that.

MOORE: Yeah.

FISHER: Just.. I was just kind of interested in that, you know.

MOORE: Knowing your family history?

FISHER: Knowing my family history, mmm.

MOORE: And uh, you have a certificate from the...

FISHER: Mmm.

MOORE: Wall of honor.

FISHER: Yeah. I'm going to go there next spring. April.

MOORE: And what does it mean to you then, being an immigrant?

FISHER: Oooh. Ah. I can't answer that, I guess. I'm not, I'm not ashamed of it,  
no.

MOORE: Mmm.

FISHER: But I'm proud to be an American just so.

MOORE: And so um...

FISHER: [interposed] I still stand up for the Star Spangled Banner and all that  
stuff. Cross my heart and all...

MOORE: And how, and so you feel um... you feel that your family m... felt they  
made a good decision in coming?

FISHER: Oh mercy yes. I would think so.

MOORE: And, you said that your parents, you think your parents said that? Did  
they say that verbally to you? When you were children? Or was it

FISHER: [interposed] Well it's usually when they have company and they said  
"Pretty nice place to live," you know. Are... We have folks in Grand

Rapids. That's my mother's sister, lives in Grand Rapids. And they come down and visit us because they had money. We couldn't visit them. And they "My, got a nice place here." Well, they mortgage on it too but they don't care about stuff like that, you know. Just... just a nice looking place and it was. It's what paid for the whole... We paid 11,000 bucks for that farm. 90 acres. That was worth 10,000 dollar lot. And we sold for how much? 7500. Same 90, in Depression. The boys didn't want a farm. I didn't want to farm.

MOORE: So you sold that farm during the Depression?

FISHER: My mother, my nana did and might as well sell out I guess. She, she got enough to build a, buy a nice home in Coldwaters. She's happy the last fifteen years, I'd say. Yeah.

MOORE: So your parents, when did your parents die?

FISHER: Ah, no... dad, dad died, he had a... He was about 51 years old, I guess. I don't know when he died... My mother died. She was, she's uh, I think 93 when she died. Christmas Day, she had a party for it. And the next day, she gone. Like that.

MOORE: Must have been some party.

FISHER: I thank God I wasn't there, 'cause I was working downtown. She didn't invite me.

MOORE: (laughs) Well is there anything that you'd like to say, at all, about um, anything more you'd like to add?

FISHER: I was just mighty glad that I did what I did because it is limited.

MOORE: Mmm.

FISHER: I had a good job... nice home, nice family.

MOORE: Did you ever think of ever going back to Holland to live?

FISHER: No. Queen Beatrix [current Queen in the constitutional monarchy of the Netherlands, reign: 1980 to present], don't care for her.

MOORE: (laughs)

FISHER: Queen Juliana [Queen Beatrix's mother, former Queen of the Netherlands, rule: 1948-1980], she's bad too.

MOORE: (still laughing) Okay, I'd like to thank you for inviting us here for your whole family...

FISHER: [interposed] Oh yeah, I anticipated this.

MOORE: For taking time to come out and speak with you about your immigration experience and...

FISHER: Mmm.

MOORE: You're the youngest one. The youngest we have that came over, 9 months, 9 months old and ah. Well this is Kate Moore signing off with Charles Fisher on the fifth of December, 1993 for the Ellis Island Oral History Project.

FISHER: That is correct.

MOORE: Thank you.

FISHER: Mmm.