The Gift of Time—Pamela Jobin
By Sharon Carlson, Director, Archives and Regional History Collections

What do you call a person who has consistently dedicated many hours almost every week of the year to special projects for the University Libraries? What do you call a person who works simply for the satisfaction of a job well done and whose only payback is the promotion of resources found in the Archives and Regional History Collections at WMU? The inadequate word often used is “volunteer” and the person in mind is Pamela Jobin, whose volunteer career at WMU spans nearly 30 years. However, you must read on to see how much this “volunteer” has done for the University archives.

Libraries and librarianship have been part of Pamela Jobin’s life since her elementary school days. She worked as a student librarian in Lamphere High School in eastern Michigan and later for the Madison Heights Public Library. Jobin’s initial contact with Western Michigan University began as an undergraduate. She came to Kalamazoo in 1965 from Madison Heights and earned a degree in business administration in 1969. Not surprisingly, she pursued library employment as a student at WMU. During this early period, she worked in the physical processing unit in Waldo Library and in the Business Library then located on East Campus. In the late 1970s, she enrolled in Western’s School of Librarianship. It was during her graduate studies that Mrs. Jobin became acquainted with the University Archives and Regional History Collections. Because of her interest in “special” library services, she soon found herself working as a volunteer who was organizing papers and assisting with projects at the Archives, which were, at that time, located in the lower level of the “old” Waldo Library.

When her graduate degree was completed, but no local position immediately available, Mrs. Jobin decided to offer additional hours to the Archives, and, in November of 1981, she began working at the Archives on a regular basis. Initially, she helped curator Phyllis Burnham respond to the various reference requests, including genealogy questions. This was an especially good fit because she had started her personal genealogical research when her two children, Lisa and Matthew, were elementary school age.

Over time, Mrs. Jobin became more and more involved in the processing and cataloging of collections. Her library science course work was beneficial as she took a leading role in launching the first bibliographic database, MicroMARC, which is a “microcomputer collections management system for use by libraries, archives, special collections, museums etc” (https://www.msu.edu/~user/musmarc/). In fact, she left her volunteer status between 1987 and 1989 and became a contractual employee, working with William K. Smith, a former faculty mentor from the library school, to input Marc records. This catalog would serve as the basis for the RHHistory catalog and the current project to migrate these records to WestCat and WorldCat.

At several points during her volunteer career, Mrs. Jobin worked at area bookstores, including Tom Sawyer’s Book Raft in Portage and Deadly Passions in downtown Kalamazoo. Time and again, she left those paid positions to spend more time on special projects at the Archives. She also had two other stints of part-time employment at the Archives. As part of her volunteer efforts, Mrs. Jobin was one of the four editors writing text for the revised edition of the Guide to the Western Michigan University Regional History Collections published in 1998. She also worked part-time from mid-2006 to early 2008 when Suzanne Husband, then curator of the Regional History Collections, was on leave. Most recently, Pamela, given her long involvement with institutional history, helped orient Jennifer Wood when she became the RHC curator in January 2008.

Most of Mrs. Jobin’s volunteer work these days involves the migration of the Archives’ catalog records into WestCat, the Libraries’ online catalog. In this capacity, she also works with staff of the Libraries’ Technical Services (cataloging acquisitions, binding, processing, etc.) Department. Her thirty years of experience make her an excellent resource for many different types of questions. Moreover, she also handles some genealogical inquiries, especially those involving French Canadian research, her area of expertise.

In addition to her volunteer work at the Archives, which averages about 20 hours a week, Mrs. Jobin completed her Certification in Canadian Records from the National Institute for Genealogical Studies, Toronto, last fall. Away from the Archives, she enjoys reading and crocheting. She recently celebrated a landmark wedding anniversary (40 years) with her husband Brian, who retired from Pfizer in 2006. Pamela is actively involved in the lives of her grandchildren, Justin, Malachi, Ryan, and Isaac, who live in Vicksburg and Grand Rapids.

As one looks back over the previous paragraphs, the word “volunteer” does not begin to describe Pamela Jobin’s contributions to the collections and services of WMU’s archival and regional history collections. In fact, these brief comments cannot express the gratitude of the staff for her continuing relationship with the Archives. Her input is sought out and valued on projects such as the catalog migration from RHHistory to WestCat. “Ask Pam” is frequently heard around the Archives, and she usually has the answer to almost any question because of her three decades of work with the records and materials. The University Libraries is truly the beneficiary of a priceless gift of time and expertise.