

John J. Grabowski

John Joseph Grabowski (born January 15, 1949) is a professor emeritus at [Case Western Reserve University](#) (CWRU) where he served as the Krieger-Mueller Associate Professor of Applied History from 1999 until his retirement in 2025. Since 2012, he has been the Krieger-Mueller Historian and Senior Vice President for Research and Publications at the [Western Reserve Historical Society](#) (WRHS), and he still performs contract research. He has been the chief editor for the [Encyclopedia of Cleveland History](#) since 2003. He is the leading expert on Cleveland history and specialized in immigration and migration.^[1]

Personal Life and Education

Grabowski was born near Harvard and E. 71st in Cleveland, Ohio on January 15, 1949 to steel mill worker Bernard Joseph and Frances Josephine Grabowski (née Wolf). His father's family was from modern-day Poland and Mother's family is Slovenian. Bernard served in World War II. Grabowski has one brother, Gary.^[2]

Grabowski attended South High School. In 1971 he graduated with honors, magna cum laude with his B.A. in History from Case Western Reserve University. He continued his education there, earning his M.A. in History in January of 1973 and his Ph.D. in American History in January of 1977. His dissertation is titled "A Social Settlement in a Neighborhood in Transition, Hiram House, Cleveland, Ohio, 1896-1926." He recieved official archivist certifications in 1989 and 1997.^[3]

He currently lives in Cleveland with his wife, Diane Louise Ewart Grabowski, a fellow Clevelander and historian. They married in the spring of 1978 in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio.^[4] Grabowski met his wife at WRHS when she was waiting to interview for an internship.^[1] Ewart is an accomplished historian herself, having written "Without Whose Aid", a 1996 book about the [Cleveland Clinic](#).^[5] Grabowski and his wife have worked on several books together, including *Corporate Memory and Guide for the Future: Creating Archives for U.S. Community Foundations* in 1993; *Cleveland: A History in Motion* in 2000; *Cleveland Then and Now* in 2002; and co-edited *Identity, Conflict and Cooperation: Central Europeans in Cleveland, 1850-1930* in 2003.^[1] They also collaborate on consulting work.^[3]

Professorship

Case Western Reserve University (CWRU)

Grabowski taught at CWRU from 1999 until his retirement in 2025. Grabowski was the Krieger-Mueller Associate Professor of Applied History in the College of Arts and Sciences at CWRU. He taught courses focusing on American social and economic history, historiography, historical methods, immigration, and museums and archives topics.^[3] He also taught "courses in sports history, the Civil War and public history," explaining that that is the "history practiced outside academia: in museums, books, national parks, TV, movies, websites, newspapers, magazines."^[1] One of his classes' projects initiated collaboration between WRHS and CWRU for undergraduate work. He had his students use WRHS's collection and museum to conduct historical research about American food, clothing, and shelter in an effort to encourage them to use "nontraditional evidence to explore a critical historical question about American society."^[6] Some of his syllabi are archived in the [Journal of American History's](#) "Textbooks & Teaching" repository.^[7]

Previous positions he held at CWRU before his Associate Professorship included: Managing Editor of *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, 1981-2000; Editor of *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, 2000-present; Adjunct Assistant Professor, 1988-1998; and Assistant Professor, 1998-2000.^[3]

Instruction Elsewhere

Grabowski also taught at [Cuyahoga Community College](#) in 1977, 1978, and 1980; was a visiting assistant professor at [Kent State's](#) School of Library Science in the summers of 1981 and 1982, and the fall of 1992; and was an adjunct assistant professor at [Cleveland State University's](#) department of history from 1986-1995 where he supervised archival interns and taught undergraduate and graduate lecture courses.^[3] He also taught at [Bilkent University](#) in Turkey for two [Fulbright](#) fellowships, during which he wrote a history of the university.^[1]

Western Reserve Historical Society (WRHS)

Grabowski is WRHS's Senior Vice President of Research and Publications.^[8] His research specialty is immigration and migration on local, national, and global levels. Other interests include sports history, Cleveland history, historiography, and cultural heritage institutional development.^[9] He started at WRHS as a book page in 1969 during his undergraduate career. He later helped create the Cleveland Regional Ethnic Archives in 1971.

He has held numerous positions at WRHS: Vice President for Collections, 2008-2012; Director of Research, 1994-2008; Interim Library Director, 2002-2004; Interim Director, History Museum,

1998-1999; Curator of Manuscripts, 1985-1994; Associate Curator of Manuscripts, 1977-1985; Ethnic Archives Specialist, 1971-1977; and Picture Specialist, 1973-1977.^[3]

As the Curator of Manuscripts, Grabowski created a Manual for the Arrangement and Description of Manuscript Collections, first in 1987, and revised in 1994. As part of his involvement with the Cleveland Regional Ethnic Archives Project, Grabowski established the Northeast Ohio Lesbian/Gay Archives at WRHS in collaboration with the Lesbian/Gay Community Service Center of Greater Cleveland.^[10]

Curated Exhibitions at WRHS

- *Remembering D Day, Cleveland Goes to War*, 1994.
- *Souvenir; Time, Travel, and Memory*, 1994.
- *Spare Time*, 1995
- *Cleveland: What's in a Name?* 1995.
- *The Peoples of Cleveland*, 1996.
- *Father of our Country and Secular Saint, The Image of George Washington*, 1999.
- *The Victory of Self: The LGBT Community of Northeastern Ohio*, 2014.

Works

Encyclopedia of Cleveland History

The [Encyclopedia of Cleveland History](#) is an ongoing collaborative project between CWRU and WRHS and is a historical reference work that covers the communities of Greater Cleveland and Northeast Ohio.^[11] It was first released in print (1987 and 1996) then moved online.^[12] Grabowski joined the project in 1981 as managing editor. The CWRU Department of History created the Krieger-Mueller Chair as a joint position between the university and WRHS to oversee the project.^[13]

Selected Publications

Grabowski is a prolific author having written, edited, and collaborated on upwards of 90 books, chapters, and papers. Listed below are selected publications:

Independent Works

- "WRHS in Search of Ethnic History," *The Ohio Archivist*, Fall 1971.
- "Ethnic Collections of the Western Reserve Historical Society," *Illinois Libraries*, March 1975.

- "Michael P. Kniola: Polish Entrepreneur," *Western Reserve Historical Society News*, May 1977.
- "Ethnic Research in Cleveland," *The Immigration History Newsletter*, May 1977.
- "From Progressive to Patrician: George Bellamy and Hiram House Social Settlement, 1896-1914," *Ohio History*, Winter 1977-1978.
- "Ethnicity in Perspective; the Collections of the Western Reserve Historical Society," *Ethnic Forum*, September 1981.
- "Ethnic Ephemerata and Newsprint: A Case for Better Bibliographic Control," *Ethnic Forum*, Fall 1982.
- "Mr. Sweeney's Viaduct, A Study using Historic Photographs," *Journal of the Cuyahoga County Archives*, Volume II, 1983.
- "Fragments or Components: Theme Collections in a Local Setting," *The American Archivist*, 1985.
- "Social Reform and Philanthropic Order," in *Ohio's Western Reserve, A Regional Reader*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1988.
- "1.2 Million Words About Cleveland," *The Gamut* (Cleveland State University), Summer, 1988.
- "Parochial, But Potent: Local Foundation Records at the Western Reserve Historical Society" in *Establishing Foundation Archives: A Reader and Guide to First Steps*. Washington: Council on Foundations, 1991.
- "Archivists and Immigrants, Embarking for New Destinations Together," in *Documenting Diversity: The Report of the Committee to Document the American Immigrant Experience*. St. Paul: Immigration History Research Center, The University of Minnesota, 1991.
- *Sports in Cleveland: An Illustrated History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- "Keepers, Users, and Funders: Building an Awareness of Archival Value" Reprinted in, *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2000.) Edited by Randall C. Jimerson.
- "Republican Perceptions, Time and the *Gülcemal*" *Turkish Yearbook of International Relations*. May 2002.
- "Going Public with Introductory American History" *The Journal of American History*. March 2002.
- "Prospects and Challenges: The Study of Early Turkish Immigration to the United States," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25 (Fall 2005).
- "Forging New Links in the Early Turkish Migration Chain: The U.S. Census and early Twentieth Century Ships' Manifests," *International Journal of Turkish Studies* 12 (Fall 2006). Reprinted in *Turkish Migration to the United States from Ottoman Times to the Present*. Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2008.
- "History and Enterprise: Past Profit and Future in the USA," *Journal of American Studies in Turkey*, 2006.
- *There are No Strangers at the Feast: Catholicism and Community in Northeastern Ohio*. Cleveland: Western Reserve Historical Society, 2008.
- "Cleveland: Economics, Images and Expectations" in *Cleveland History and Economics Journal*, Cleveland: Teaching Cleveland, 2011

- "Turkish Immigration to America, 1870-Present" in *Encyclopedia of U.S. Immigration History*, ABC Clio.
- "The Past as Prologue: Public Authority and the *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*." *The Public Historian*. Vol. 35 No. 2, May 2013.
- *Cleveland A to Z: Historical Essentials for Newcomers and Residents in Northeastern Ohio*. Cleveland: Western Reserve Historical Society, 2017.
- *Bilkent: Thirty Years in Historical Perspective*. Ankara: Bilkent University, 2018.
- *Cleveland A-Z: An Essential Compendium for Visitors and Residents Alike*, 2019.
- *Cleveland's Cultural Gardens: A Landscape of Diversity*, 2022.

Selected Papers

- "Can there be a History of the People: An Ethnic Appraisal of the New Left's Dream," Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, 1978.
- "Making History Inclusive, The Cleveland Experience" Conference, "Understanding Community History," Edinboro State College, Edinboro, Pennsylvania, 1981.
- "A Question of Identity: Turkish Immigrants in America, Then and Now". Ege University Cultural Studies Symposium, Izmir, Turkey, 2002
- "History and Enterprise Past, Profit and Future in the USA" American Studies Association of Turkey Conference, Antalya, 2004.
- "Generational Change and Diasporic Challenges" presented at the conference: Intergenerational Differences as a Challenge for the Slovenian Emigrant Communities and the Slovenian Communities in Neighbouring Countries in Comparative Perspective, Ljubljana, Slovenia, June 2011.
- "Bridging the Divide between Academic and Public History: A Roundtable" Western History Association, St. Paul, MN 2016

Collaborations

- Associate compiler, *Ethnic Groups in Ohio; An Annotated Bibliographic Guide*, Cleveland: Cleveland State University, 1975.
- Co-author, *Polish Americans and Their Communities in Cleveland*, Cleveland: Cleveland State University, 1976.
- Co-compiler, *A Guide to Jewish History Sources in the History Library of the Western Reserve Historical Society*, Cleveland: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1983.
- Co-editor, with David D. Van Tassel, and chapter author, *Cleveland: A Tradition of Reform*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1986.
- Co-editor, with David D. Van Tassel, *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Co-editor, with David D. Van Tassel, *Cleveland: A Concise History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.
- Co-author, *The Terminal Tower, Tower City Center: A Historical Perspective*. Cleveland: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1990.
- Author of introduction to the reprinted edition of William G. Rose's *Cleveland: The Making of a City*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1990.

- Co-author, with Diane E. Grabowski, *Corporate Memory and Guide for the Future: Creating Archives for U.S. Community Foundations*. The Council on Foundations, 1993.
- Author of introduction to the reprinted edition of Tom L. Johnson's *My Story*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1993.
- Co-editor, with David D. Van Tassel. *The Fine Arts In Cleveland: An Illustrated History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- Co-editor, with David D. Van Tassel. *Women in Cleveland: An Illustrated History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Co-editor, with David D. Van Tassel, *The Dictionary of Cleveland Biography*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- Co-editor, with David D. Van Tassel, *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History* (second edition) Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).
- Co-editor, with David D. Van Tassel, *Cleveland: A Concise History*, (second edition, 1997).
- Co-author, with Diane E. Grabowski, *Cleveland: A History in Motion: Transportation, Industry & Community in Northeast Ohio*, Encinitas, CA: Heritage Media Press, 2000.
- Co-author, with Diane E. Grabowski, *Cleveland Then and Now (Then & Now Thunder Bay)*. San Diego: Thunderbay Press, London: Chrysalis Books, 2002.
- Co-editor, with David C. Hammack and Diane E. Grabowski, *Identity, Conflict and Cooperation: Central Europeans in Cleveland, 1850-1930*. Cleveland: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 2003.
- Co-author, with Alan Bennett, *Remembering Cleveland's Jewish Voices*, 2011.
- Co-editor, with Sean Martin, *Cleveland Jews: The Making of a Midwestern Community*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020.
- Foreword of *Empire Builders: An Illustrated History of the Rise and Fall of Cleveland's Van Sweringen Brothers* by Lauren R. Pacini, 2024.

Consulting, Talks, and Other Work

Editing

- Managing Editor, [Society of Ohio Archivists Newsletter](#), 1979 – 1989.
- Managing Editor, *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, 1981 – 2003
- Editor, *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, 2003 – present.
- Editorial Advisory Board, [Journal of Ankara Studies](#), 2013 to present.

Consulting and Lectures

Grabowski has performed extensive archival consulting work throughout his career, assisting institutions including: Boy Scouts of America; the Mahoning Valley Historical Society in Youngstown, Ohio; University Hospitals in Cleveland; J. M. Smucker Co. in Orville, Ohio; and the National Endowment for the Humanities in many capacities between 1986 and 2018.

He is also often asked for an expert comment for articles and documentaries regarding immigration and Cleveland history and current events, such as Cleveland's [1986 Balloonfest](#)

and Southern- and Eastern-European immigration into America.^{[14][15]} He also publishes popular articles on current topics such as the [2024 solar eclipse](#).^[16]

Grabowski gives frequent talks and lectures, even in retirement. Past appearances have discussed immigration and its effect on local urban growth, the study of local history, oral histories, and twentieth-century housing reform efforts. He frequently talks at CWRU, [John Carroll University](#), Cleveland State University, and Cuyahoga Community College. His oral histories detail stories such as the [1918 Spanish flu](#), local entertainment and culture, and the [Cleveland Cultural Gardens](#).^[17]

Awards

- [Phi Beta Kappa](#), 1971
- Fenn Foundation Archival Fellowship, January-June, 1971
- [NDEA](#) Title IV Fellowship, September 1971
- Hilbert T. Ficken Award, [Baldwin Wallace College](#), 1990
- Fulbright Senior Lecturer, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey, 1996-1997, 2004-2005

References

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 15. Vanac, Mary (2019-08-10). ["The transfusion Cleveland needs"](#). *Crain's Cleveland Business*. Retrieved 2025-11-15.
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