

Louisville StorySites

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Capstone Reflection Paper
Masters of Arts in Cultural Sustainability
Goucher College

July 2018

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Abstract

The purpose for this capstone project is to produce a web-based product which showcases the intersection of story and place in Louisville, KY's historic cultural landscapes. My *guiding question* is: How can historic preservation methods be incorporated with creative use of personal narratives surrounding place to enhance the cultural vitality of communities?

The project invited three local residents to share their stories around a significant historic site in their community that is meaningful to them, specifically individuals who are passionate about historic sites that are at risk or neglected. These stories are then used in collaborative partnerships through creating digital stories, presented through videos¹ on the website louisvillestoriesites.org through an interactive map, which aim to amplify community impact in areas of the city where community input has not been valued, through showcasing cultural connections to place through the power of storytelling. These digital narratives shine a light on significant historic sites in Louisville, KY that are, were, or could, benefit from historic preservation methods. They also emphasize the vital relationship between the built environment and the community stories that give them significance.

Statement of Rationale

Historic preservation is often disconnected from the communities its policies are meant to serve. As a historic preservation consultant in Louisville, KY, I see this disconnect in my community. "There is a gap in the legal system of protection afforded to socially valuable resources...Historic preservation protects man-made aspects of the cityscape especially architecturally significant buildings. Largely unprotected are resources that are

¹ Videos are hosted for public viewing on YouTube.

valuable for their ability to convey history, support community memory, and nurture people's attachment to place."²

At the same time, historic preservationists are well aware of the negative reputation the field has. It is seen as invasive, dictating what people can and cannot do to their own properties. Preservation is seen as nostalgic, placing sentiment onto bygone eras in our history. Preservation is known to be reactionary. Only when a precious structure linked to important history is on the verge of collapse, after years of dilapidation, do preservationists swoop in to save our historic structures. This is often due to the fact that preservationists "all too often specialized in top-down history that primarily, if not solely, focused on the great deeds of white men."³ The modern crux of preservation lies in the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and there has been little change in its focus since then. Preservation revolves around the criterion for The National Register of Historic Places. The integrity criterion places a lot of significance on "whether a property(s) today reflects the spatial organization, physical components, and historic associations that it attained during the period of significance."⁴ While not inflexible, the integrity criterion obviously favors sites with a precisely definable and datable historical significance...over sites of broader association with community culture or tradition. It also prizes continuity of material and design over continuity of use or association."⁵ This shows the most detrimental stereotype of the field, that historic preservation is elitist. It serves wealthy neighborhoods with high architecture, catering to the legacies of

² Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 38.

³ Stephanie Meeks, *The Past and Future City*, (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2016), 169.

⁴ The period of significance is a demarcated chronological time that adheres to the criteria of the National Register of Historic Places. This is determined by a preservation professional in order to nominate and propose a listing. This can be limiting, not in the fact that it reduces a place to set time periods, but that districts with periods of significance thus have sites that are deemed "contributing" or "non-contributing" structures depending on where they fall in that period listed.

⁵ Kauffman 64.

those who have had the privilege to write history. As a preservationist with experience in a specific community, I can say that all of these stereotypes are true. However, it is also my experience that historic preservation can be so much more. It can be a set of tools rather than a set of strict instructions. The economic impact it has had on my state, one of the poorest in the country, is impressive⁶.

This disconnect seems to only be expanding. The limitations in preservation policy sometimes lead to shortsighted outcomes and often fail to highlight the importance of the people who live in historic communities, regardless of intent. Preservation policy inherently becomes wrapped up in the systemic issues that plague minority and low-income areas, or is abused by entities or people with power to take ownership over these kinds of blighted areas. These problems make examining historic preservation through a new lens an opportunity to focus on social justice. I see historic preservation as a vital tool where its methodologies can be adapted to fit the lens of cultural sustainability.

Preservationist Max Page states:

Preservation does not have to be paired with gentrification, or absent from the poorest areas, or a contributor to the housing crisis. It can, in fact be a tool for securing more just communities. If preservationists truly care about creating dense cities and towns without pushing out the poor, they will have to offer a new model for saving both buildings and communities. Preservation has to be reconfigured as a social justice movement or else it will have lost its moral compass. Politics inheres in every choice humans make about what to preserve and how to preserve it. The

⁶ The Kentucky Heritage Council website reports that a million dollars spent in the rehabilitation of a historic building adds 23 jobs to the local economy. That is 2.5 more jobs than is created by a million dollars of new construction in Kentucky and 8 more jobs than a million dollars of manufacturing output in Kentucky. In 2017, Kentucky ranked 13th nationally utilizing the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, with 26 successfully completed projects generating investment of \$128,438,374. And since the state tax credit was enacted in 2005, 813 buildings have been rehabilitated. (<https://heritage.ky.gov/community/Pages/economic-impact.aspx>)

historic preservation movement must be reconfigured as a key ally in a broader movement for social justice.⁷

As much as preservationists like to tout the benefits of its policies, which can help address societal and cultural maladies, it is shameful that this has not been a top priority, at least in Louisville. This is a harsh criticism; however, it is also difficult to execute preservation policy to make real, impactful change that does not trigger things such as gentrification, whether economically or culturally. Stephanie Meeks, the CEO of The National Trust, has openly admitted, “because traditional preservationists had often been slow to help in the past, many communities who believed their stories had not been told, and the places they cared about had not received the attention they deserve, had been working on their own to restore neighborhoods and beloved places.”⁸ However, in the same breath she states that “now, the preservation movement has joined the fight.”⁹ Preservation still lives in the archaic pomposity of federal, state, and city policies. Historic preservation too often happens *to* communities, even with the best intentions, instead of *with* communities.

The National Trust and other entities may be developing more inclusive grants and showcasing more diverse stories, but I see little impact in my community. Sites are still picked and chosen in isolation. While the historic I. Willis Cole House documented through this project was demolished, another culturally significant building, Quinn Chapel, a mere few blocks away, has recently received a preservation restoration grant from the National Park Service. The Cole House stabilization grant fell through because the house was privately owned, instead of city ownership. This was never listed as a qualifying factor for

⁷ Max Page, *Why Preservation Matters*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), 80.

⁸ Meeks, 174

⁹ Ibid, 174

the grant. With the little time and resources the city preservation staff has, they applied for this grant as a final effort to restore the Cole House. Quinn Chapel, on the other hand, received a sizeable grant from the Park Service's African American Civil Rights grant. Quinn Chapel has important history regarding Martin Luther King Jr. and Muhammad Ali, which is more nationally recognized in comparison to a local activist such as I. Willis Cole. Moreover, that grant will only cover a small portion of the larger restoration project. One site is not more important than another just because the argument for restoration fits more neatly into a palatable package and narrative.

The question arises, how can this disconnect between bureaucracy and community be bridged? It is about equal partnerships. If the community does not have a seat at the table, change will never happen. "Success is bred in the diversity of players, interests, sectors, differences, and imaginations...the creation of good strategies and plans requires you to reach out...need[ing] their expertise, creativity, and resources."¹⁰

My work in the field has revealed to me there is a real need for preservation professionals in city, state, and private organizational entities to prioritize the community. We need community input. There is a much richer cultural context and history that one cannot find in archives, that expands past historical survey forms, even past National Register for Historic Places nominations. As a student, this project aims to combine the knowledge I have gained from my academic studies in Cultural Sustainability with my professional historic preservation skills. The fact remains that there is no cultural documentation integrated into historic preservation policy in Louisville. There is a gap

¹⁰ Tom Borrup, *Creative Community Builder's Handbook: How to Transform Communities Using Local Assets, Arts, and Culture*, (Saint Paul, MN: Fieldstone Alliance, 2006), 153.

between the local community and “the players” who control the built environment. The city’s audience in its planning and design caters heavily to more affluent areas and pushing the narrative that Louisville is a “diamond in the rough”- that is, that Louisville is not the negative stereotypes associated with my state and the region.¹¹ There needs to be an exchange of knowledge. When preservationists know sites that communities value, they are better able to provide guidance and support depending on the circumstances of the site. When communities make their stories known to a larger audience, this shows that there is a need for private-citizen funding where preservation officials can offer support.

Every person and every community has a story to tell, and story can be powerful. Communities can start to reclaim authorship of their community narratives and the places they call home. Communities should own their cultural narrative. Community engagement through storytelling amplifies community voices, thus giving communities control over their history and the historic places in their neighborhoods. This also creates a dialogue about what places are important, not to outsiders, but insiders.

This project is just a first step. One of the ways to bridge the gap is to engage individuals in their distinctive communities to identify places of importance and tell and document their personal stories that relate to those places. Ned Kaufman notes, “Because historical and cultural sites don’t necessarily release their meaning to the casual spectator, meaning needs to be teased out and explained. Preservationists, therefore, must be willing, indeed eager, to use every available resource to tell the stories that make places significant, and

¹¹ It is common knowledge that Kentucky has been painted in the media as backwards, poor, and uneducated. Though my state suffers from poverty, the narrative has been defined over time from unethical economic practices in Appalachia to fabricated narratives repeated over time focusing on outdated or untruthful stereotypes.

to tell them in a compelling fashion.”¹² Digital storytelling is one way to go beyond written reports, push past assigned labels, and expose the cultural vitality of these historic sites, or rather, “storysites”¹³.

Methodology

Story Sites:

Ned Kaufman defines the term *story sites* “as broadly inclusive of historical sites, cultural sites, and sites of social value. [These historic places bring] socially valuable stories to mind: stories of history, tradition, and shared memory.”¹⁴ Story sites, much like individual buildings, compose larger “storyscapes” like historic landscapes. “Neighborhood storyscapes are not purely a matter of individual creation and experience. Neighborhoods have histories that are represented by places.”¹⁵ Kaufman emphasizes the narratives that people have in association to places. Historic places in particular conjure up meaningful and significant stories. These places are physical reminders of the past. They are the setting for a whole neighborhood of people’s memories. “Everyone has a personal storyscape. The sites within it are associated with important events or episodes...personal storyscapes may include buildings of recognized architectural value but will almost certainly include sites whose importance is not obvious to others and that indeed hardly seem to be ‘sites’ at all.”¹⁶ Often, preservationists care about these same story sites and they are often listed on the National Register of Historic Places. However, sometimes their significance is not as recognizable to preservationists because one may not know their historic and *cultural* significance without knowing the stories behind them.

¹² Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 251.

¹³ Ibid, 38.

¹⁴ Ibid 38.

¹⁵ Ibid, 48.

¹⁶ Kaufman, 42-43.

Digital Storytelling:

Digital storytelling, as a storytelling method, fits into the practices of cultural sustainability because it is meant to help people share personal stories and be an accessible form of media for everyone to utilize. It is also a form of storytelling that is malleable and relevant to the digital age of today.¹⁷ StoryCenter is considered the leading organization in teaching the field of digital storytelling. Their mission is:

We create spaces for transforming lives and communities, through the acts of listening to and sharing stories. Our public program enables people to register individually for storytelling workshops. Our custom program collaborates with organizations around the world, on workshops in story facilitation, digital storytelling, and other forms of participatory media production...StoryCenter is committed to challenging white supremacy and supporting social justice, in every aspect of our work.¹⁸

In addition to a few basic introductions and preliminary research into digital storytelling from opportunities during my studies at Goucher, I participated in a 3 day workshop at StoryCenter in Denver, Colorado from March 8-10th. Before my training in Denver, I also participated in an introductory webinar through StoryCenter that acts as a basic introduction to their methodology. The in-person workshop was facilitated by Daniel Weinshenker, and I was with three other participants. To prepare for the workshop, each participant is asked to come with a 2-3 page personal narrative and other materials such as photos or other media to complete their own individual digital story. Also, I studied materials sent to me from StoryCenter and by viewing several digital storytelling examples on their YouTube channel.

¹⁷ Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 2-5.

¹⁸ StoryCenter, "About StoryCenter", <https://www.storycenter.org/about/>.

StoryCenter's mantra is "Listen Deeply. Tell Stories."¹⁹ Joe Lambert of StoryCenter approaches digital storytelling from a perspective of cultural democracy. He states, "the defense of creative control by the specialist creative class tends to ensure voice is not democratically distributed....So rather than watching a few authors share their stories, why not create mechanisms for millions of authors to take a crack at getting under our skin with their narratives."²⁰ Digital storytelling is for everyone. Cultural democracy is deserved by everyone, and it is a key factor in cultural sustainability.

StoryCenter follows a prescribed methodology based on their research. Participants create digital stories, which are around 3-5 minutes long. Visual components vary, depending on technical skill, tone, and the vision of the storyteller. In order to use the digital story technique as a methodology for participants in my project, my goal was to focus on facilitation: the steps taken to build a digital story, how participants were asked or encouraged to share, how my peers worked through obstacles, and paying particular attention to the role of participant and facilitator. As an introductory but intensive workshop, each person needed different support from the facilitator or the group to work out problems, which ranged from technical obstacles to formulating a concise story.

The other participants' stories were diverse. One participant's story focused on a personal journey through her religious faith, another was a writer and was more poetic and abstract, the other focused on family and family history. Each participant was encouraged to be vulnerable with their stories. It was important that the facilitator establish ground rules on listening and giving feedback at the beginning of the workshop. The methodology was similar to the story circle mediation techniques I learned from my coursework in Principles of Cultural

¹⁹ Joe Lambert, *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), ix.

²⁰ Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 41-42.

Mediation (CSP 628). There is a distinct difference between being a facilitator/instructor and someone mediating a story circle. Daniel had to wear many hats.

StoryCenter uses a story circle to share, listen, inquire, and make considerate suggestions for people's narratives. It is a useful formula, but I was already familiar with the methodology of Story Dialogue. "In Story Dialogue, individuals are invited to write and feel their stories around a generative theme- a theme that holds energy and possibility for the group. A person shares their story, others listen intently, sometimes taking notes. The storytelling is followed by a reflection circle where each person shares how the storyteller's story is also their story, and how it is different. A structured dialogue ensures guided by the questions: what (what was the story), why (why did events in the story happen as they did), now what (what are our insights) and so what (what are we going to do about it). The group closes by creating insight cards, writing down each insight...grouping these into themes."²¹

In the workshop there was not a theme, except telling a personal story. Responses to people's stories did not follow a formula or ask the questions above. Instead, StoryCenter asks that participants give feedback by stating, "If this were my story..." With personal stories, there is not a group effort to solve a problem, but the importance of Story Dialogue as it relates to this project lies in how I listen and interpret with "what", "why", "now what", and "so what". How is this my story? How is it not?

As a participant in the workshop, I had a script prepared. I had little editing to do. We were encouraged to write how we would tell someone a story, less formally. No rules were too strict, but StoryCenter definitely has its own process. Because I was so focused on trying to get everything I needed from the workshop regarding my goal of capturing others' stories through

²¹ Bojer, *Mapping Dialogue*, 134.

my Capstone project, I was not as invested in my own digital story. This was, I feel, both a hindrance and useful. I know that I have strengths as an active listener, certain writing capabilities, and an empathetic ear. My takeaway from the experience is that I learned more about how people process stories, and how, when given a space to be vulnerable and emotional, people can dive straight in. It is a needed release. I knew what I liked and did not like about the instruction. I observed that there is a very fine line while trying to instruct, facilitate, and support and insert oneself into someone else's story.

The facilitator will always be co-author in some way, and varying opinions and beliefs will always creep into any kind of collective workshop like this. As a participant, I never felt completely comfortable being pushed for more vulnerability or to "dig deeper". This approach worked for some and not for others. I saw that asking more questions opened people up to examine their stories more, making them more dynamic. It was clear that the more emotionally vulnerable a storyteller is, the more people are compelled to listen. However, in my experience during the workshop, I took away the conclusion that vulnerability is based on trust, and that it should always be understood that participants' stories are valid and have worth no matter how much raw emotion is offered. It is not something to request from participants. It is something that is optional. It can only be offered by the storyteller.

However, the most important lessons I took away from the workshop were the tools used in their preliminary process and instruction/facilitation on Day One. We were asked, "how is this a story only you can tell?" Since I am dealing with history and place, I found myself coming back to this question during this project with my participants because it is often easier to list historical facts or more obvious observations, than to focus on the unique story of one person.

Participants and Digital Storytelling

Digital Storytelling is a new concept to a lot of people. I quickly realized that the best way to help my participants and allow them to digest this medium of storytelling that they were not very familiar with, was to create a short “Digital Storytelling Guide”. This is based on Joe Lambert’s 2010 “Digital Storytelling Cookbook” provided through the StoryCenter’s workshop (see Appendix).

Listening and Facilitation:

Establishing trust was one of the most important things for me in creating a partnership with my participants. My StoryCenter training aided me in creating a personal digital story, but I understood that this project is based on partnerships and cultural mediation. Marianne Bojer points out in “Mapping Dialogue”:

The most important tool that we have as facilitators is ourselves and our presence...The facilitator influences the space and the group of people in many visible and invisible ways. Although much can be planned in advance, a highly skilled facilitator will stay present to what shows up in the moment. For the dialogue to work, the facilitator should not be caught up in pre-determined structure...To perform well a facilitator needs to develop humility, but also courage to go with the flow. If the facilitator has this kind of confidence and groundedness, he or she will also gain more legitimacy and trust from the participants.²²

Going into this project, I had a lot of unknowns. I had never facilitated something like this, even if I was just mostly meeting with one or two people at a time. As much as I struggle with certain self-doubts, it was through my coursework, especially in Principles of Cultural Mediation (CSP 628), where I found the academic reassurance that I am a good listener. I am casual but passionate. Of course these are not always the best characteristics for every potential participant. My passion could cause me to overlook conveying important information. It also means I hold strong opinions, and though I am aware of this and tried to let it not impede the

²² Marianne Bojer, et, al, *Mapping Dialogue: Essential Tools for Social Change* (Taos Tempo Series, 2008), 23-24.

direction of questions I would ask my participants, I know I did not always get it right. My humor and casual demeanor could be interpreted as not serious. However, it is with my experiences throughout my life that deep listening allows myself to be open and vulnerable, even if it is just in the act of listening and inquiry. That was natural for me.

Adhering to a strict timeline with participants was much harder. I also felt a deep responsibility to my participants to create a good product. I knew these were weaknesses of mine because I had never navigated this kind of space before, and though I am sure it affected my facilitation, my top priority was honoring the partnerships I had established. This may be my designed Capstone project for my graduate program, but this project is also a community-based project started with three other individuals.

Throughout the collaboration period, it is important to note that while I produced the videos, these are not my stories. As such, there is a balance between inserting myself into these stories because I am framing questions, following certain leads where I see particular themes arise, suggesting edits to their written personal narratives, and then creating the video. There is no doubt that I am “in” these stories; however, I did want to make sure that my release forms²³ became sort of a symbolic contract of partnership, and thus included a clause that the participants are the authors of their own stories. If at anytime they do not wish for their story to be public, they have the right to request that I remove it. In this partnership, there has been a lot of time and emotional investment being offered to me for my graduate capstone project.

It was important to me that participants felt that this is their project in some way too. I have a lot of potential power in this partnership, but it was a priority that my position remained as a collaborator in the building process, but not the owner of these narratives.

²³Release forms can be found in a PDF on Goucher College Libraries MD-SOAR

Technology to Create Digital Materials and Website:

The learning curve and investment of time and resources into learning about all the forms of technology that went into this project was much steeper than I expected. Intensive research and practice went into learning the following:

- Audio recording and equipment
- Audio editing through the program *Audacity*
- Website building that could incorporate embedded code for the interactive story map, which can be updated at any time. Learning and using a Google API Key for the interactive map.
- Video editing, especially with storyboarded still images provided by participants. There are frequently abstract concepts, which fill up time in recorded narratives that need a visual image.

Collaboration Process:

The first step to finding participants was a lot of networking. While there are often community or neighborhood advocates who are also interested in the preservation of community history, this was one of the most tedious tasks in terms of time. I contacted a lot of people, which resulted in a few repeated situations: no response, delayed responses, scheduling conflicts, and meetings that did not fit the project. Eventually though, I identified three key participants.

- Don Haag, Schnitzelburg Taverns
- Nora Cole, I. Willis Cole House
- Carrye Jones, The Plymouth Settlement House

After initial contact and phone discussions, I conducted a preliminary meeting with each participant. Follow up meetings depending on the needs and expectations of the participant, time restraints, and settling on a particular place. This process also took much more time than I expected. However, generally, meetings followed these steps:

- Initial meeting, explanation and discussion of project, scope of work, assessment of interest and direction, establishing parameters of the partnership
- Site visit, general discussion over site(s), a general personal history of the participant's relationship to the place, overview of digital storytelling process, and assurance and final agreement of partnership and signing of release form
- Phone and e-mail communication between meetings, exchanging ideas, sending materials, personal narrative feedback
- Workshop meeting to finalize personal narrative
- Recording session
- Storyboarding session with continued phone and e-mail communication
- E-mail approval of final video to be posted on the website

Participants:

Don Haag and I met with his late wife, Janice, at Check's Café. A local historian and neighborhood association member, Lisa Pisterman, put us in contact. Don grew up in Schnitzelburg, and his family dates back to the neighborhood since at least the late 1800s. Though Don does not live there anymore, he is an active member of the neighborhood. He provides history walks of the neighborhood, and has written a chapter of a book on German history in Louisville. He dines at Check's several times a week. A current project of his with other longtime residents (or former), is to form some sort of small neighborhood museum. Don is a walking textbook, with stories about all kinds of people who lived in the neighborhood over the years.

Don particularly wanted to speak about the taverns. *Schnitzelburg*, or as some just call the whole area, *Germantown*, is known for its bars- old and new. These neighborhood hubs have acted as neighborhood gathering places for decades. Schnitzelburg and the adjacent

Germantown neighborhoods have seen a lot of changes in recent years. Property values have increased immensely, with younger people moving into the area for what was once cheaper housing, located close to other culturally attractive areas in Louisville, and now featuring more hip craft beer bars and restaurants. Don and I spoke about the Catch-22 situation of it all- that there was a time when the area was going downhill, and businesses were failing, so the surge of popularity has saved structures and kept the neighborhood alive. However, there is a cultural loss with such drastic change. Residents have complained about the higher property taxes, but the more traditional sense of gentrification, pushing people out of the neighborhood, is not a big issue. There is a kind of cultural gentrification going on, and it feels that there is a sense of urgency to preserve the community's traditions and history, and make them accessible to the public.

Nora Cole (granddaughter of Willis Cole) and I started working together when I documented the I. Willis Cole House for my Cultural Documentation Field Lab (CSP 610F) Course. I. Willis Cole was the first African American to start a weekly newspaper in Louisville and was an avid activist for Civil Rights. I was connected to Nora through preservation contacts I had at the city. They had just found out that a roof stabilization grant had been withheld for the property because of a lack of communication about the eligibility of the house for funding. I was in the process of documenting the house when the roof collapsed, and I was there to witness part of the demolition, which had been ordered by the city.

Since last September, Nora and I have been working together, building trust, and establishing a partnership. Once the Cole House was demolished last October, although we had spoken about a potential capstone project, I did not know how to continue. It was actually the demolition and Nora's story about her efforts to preserve the house, which inspired this project.

As Nora states in her digital story, “This did not have to happen,” I felt that very sentiment the moment the demolition moved forward, especially for such an iconic site that perfectly fits into the categories for historic preservation.

Nora’s story is about loss, but it is also about perseverance. I know that Nora’s story needs to be told and reach a broader audience. It has the potential to provide a concrete example of when preservation fails the general public in a way that never should have happened. It proves why this work- of telling her story- is so important, and she gifted me with that privilege.

I got in contact with Carrye Jones through Becky Gorman, a preservation specialist with the city. Carrye is on the Landmarks Commission for the city. She grew up in the Russell area, and deeply cares about the history of the neighborhood. Carrye is a proponent for historic preservation, but she is also very pragmatic about it. In terms of Russell, and all the changes happening in the community, from blight, vacant and abandoned properties, to the 30 plus million dollar HUD grants going towards the Vision Russell Public Housing Project, it is my impression that Carrye cares most about the residents, knowing the strong shoulders that they stand on.²⁴

Russell is about more than revamping public housing and addressing a neighborhood in “crisis”. Russell was and still is a African-American community, but it was once a thriving, economically diverse, and tight-knit community filled with amazing people from Carrye’s teachers to Civil Rights visionaries. Carrye and I decided to focus on The Plymouth Settlement House, which was a huge community asset when she was growing up.

She is still a member of the neighboring Plymouth Church, and she is very personally involved in trying to revitalize it. She is a strong supporter of the new Sweet Evening Breeze

²⁴ This is from my field notes, roughly quoting Carrye.

LGBTQ Youth Shelter that will be moving into the Settlement House. Though we plan to document this site through digital storytelling, through our discussions, I became more and more aware that Russell as a whole has a lot of untold stories, and a more thorough and in-depth project is needed. This would include other members of the community who grew up there with her, before and during, The Civil Rights Movement. With so much historical and personal content to go over, we were unable to complete a digital story before my graduate coursework was finished, but we plan on continued collaboration in the future.

Limitations and Issues:

The main issues regarding this project are simple. Flexibility is key. These are the key limitations found with all three participants:

- Time. The process always takes longer than anticipated. People have varying schedules, technology almost always takes additional time. Most importantly, once you begin a story, new layers open up. A person's life is made up of layers of memory and meaning and different themes. Often, personal stories are not very linear. Moreover, the most important "story sites" in people's lives make up a larger "storyscape".²⁵
- Training. I am a novice when it comes to digital storytelling. I am not a videographer, an expert on recording and editing top quality audio, or familiar with web development.
- Funding. This project was designed by myself with no formal budget. Equipment was purchased as needed, considering affordability and quality. Having the best equipment, studio space, certain software and programs all cost money for a higher quality product.

²⁵ Kaufman, 38.

- Emotional Energy. Personal stories require participants and the facilitator to be vulnerable. Stories are not always pleasant, and at times painful. This is also a very intimate process.
- Authorship. The participants own these stories, but there is an inherent impact that the facilitator has on this process. It can bring up certain questions over positionality and the creative process.

Going Forward

Louisville StorySites has a lot of potential to move forward by working with individuals identifying and documenting important places in their communities. I can envision the interactive map on the website full of points from many areas of Louisville. People have expressed interest in the project.

For the purposes of this initial phase I dove in - as a collaborator, as a story editor, as a researcher, and as a listener. Along with my participants, I am a novice in many ways to the digital storytelling medium, and a lot of the technology that goes into it.

What I learned through networking and digging into the community was the need to broadcast larger, collective narratives, which could evolve in different ways. I was asked to run a digital storytelling workshop for a neighborhood association. Someone else mentioned that there needs to be an app for the Civil Rights Sit-In Walk²⁶, which was designed by a partnership between the University of Louisville and the city. Carrye and I are in the beginning stages of how best to map out Russell by using personal stories that are only common knowledge to an older generation which has left the area.

²⁶ <http://louisville.edu/artsandsciences/idep/engagement/civil-rights-markers-project/files/downtownCivilRightsMarker2015.pdf>

These are all exciting possibilities. This shows that there is a real need for creative ways to document community history to bolster community driven historic preservation in these places. It is also a massive undertaking, requiring many skill sets and the funding to go with it. That part is the big unknown. I am interested in taking another workshop with StoryCenter on facilitation. There are people who I want to follow up with, to create and collaborate on digital stories. Since there are unknowns, and impact has not been measured yet- it is difficult to say how this will manifest.

Conclusion

This project focuses on digital storytelling surrounding place as a new way to approach cultural documentation for historic preservation practices. It creatively engages community members to share their personal narratives, and by doing that, helps sustain culture by offering cultural knowledge for community wellbeing. It also provides a platform for historic preservation professionals to engage with and a means to listen and learn from these narratives. Louisville StorySites identified three key participants in Louisville who collaborated on describing significant historic places to them and facilitated telling their personal narratives surrounding these places through digital stories.

It is my professional goal and passion to merge my preservation knowledge with my new knowledge in Cultural Sustainability and with the techniques and methodologies described here. The possibility of finding a supportive network, a team, and more community partnerships could launch this small project with three points on a digital map into something much greater and impactful. It could amplify the voices and stories of countless individuals and communities,

engage a large audience, and change preservation practices, not only in Louisville but regionally and perhaps nationally.

Storytelling, at its very core, spreads cultural knowledge. By focusing on history, storytelling shares rich traditions. By focusing on place, storytelling showcases community values about the cultural landscape and built environment in community. Digital storytelling can amplify voice. It can be broadcast to a broader audience. It is accessible online at all times. It creates a digital archive of documentation, which will hopefully be accessible for future generations.

Change comes from within all communities. When communities become the primary authors of their community narratives, it creates a shift in power. Communities can tell preservationists what places are of cultural value. Personal stories are powerful. They can have much more impact than a written policy. They can also change minds, cultivate interest, and make change, especially for community members who may have lacked access to city planning and preservationists in the past.

Louisville StorySites seeks to do this kind of storytelling, and has laid the foundation for future community collaborations. It asks the Louisville community, what places are important to you and why? It is the intention of the project to listen and not only showcase these stories, but to broadcast them to a larger Louisville audience. When people do not have time to go to meetings, or do not think their voice will be heard at a public planning meeting regarding a historic structure in their neighborhood, Louisville StorySites will serve as a bridge between residents and planners and preservationists.

Digital storytelling is not about offering a storyteller a voice. It is a medium which allows historic preservationists and the greater Louisville community an opportunity to

listen, learn, and create dialogue. Through creating these storysites that make up Louisville's diverse cultural landscape, we can create real change. People will feel more heard. Communities will learn from each other. If just one story can touch another, in a city that is sometimes so divided, it can create a sense of understanding- a cultural dialogue. Where there is understanding, one can find empathy and respect. It will build bridges.²⁷ Stories create change. Historic preservation is absolutely a tool for social justice and for sustaining culture. We just have to start thinking of it that way.

Bibliography and Literature Review

Bojer, Marianne Millie, Heinko Roehl, Marianne Knuth, Colleen Magner. *Mapping Dialogue: Essential Tools for Social Change*. Taos Institute Publications, 2008.

This book explains various dialogue tools. It focuses on specific dialogue methods that are problem solving for sustainable social change. For this paper, it provided insight into the role of a dialogue facilitator and the methodology of Story Dialogue.

Borup, Tom. *Creative Community Builder's Handbook: How to Transform Communities Using Local Assets, Arts, and Culture*. Saint Paul, MN: Fieldstone Alliance, 2006.

Borup's book is a handbook for using arts and culture for community change. It details exactly how to do community work from forming partnerships to settings pragmatic goals. It uses case studies to support the theories laid out in the beginning of the book.

Hawkes, Jon. *The Fourth Pillar of Sustainability: Culture's essential role in public planning*. Melbourne Australia: Cultural Development Network, 2001.

Jon Hawkes, a renowned cultural planner and analyst, has created what he calls four pillars of sustainability: economic equality, social equality, environmental sustainability, and cultural vitality. His focus on the significance of cultural vitality as the last component necessary to make a community complete is of particular importance. This is a crucial element in creating public policy. Hawkes describes cultural vitality in a variety of ways such as robust diversity, tolerant cohesiveness, multi-dimensional egalitarianism,

²⁷ This is not to be confused with the controversial bridges project completed in Louisville. These bridges will not have any tolls or spoil the views of our waterfront park.

compassionate inclusivity, energetic creativity, open-minded curiosity, and confident independence.

Lambert, Joe. *Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community*. New York: Routledge, 2012.

The seven steps were created as an outline of the fundamentals of good digital storytelling, but its creators have expressed the intention that they are intended to be flexible and adaptable to appropriate aesthetics. They can be summarized as follows:

- **Owning insights:** The storyteller is encouraged to recognize the reason that they are telling the story, to acknowledge what they are actually trying to impart. The core of the story may be static, but it will change in context to the reason the storyteller is conveying it
- **Owning emotions:** Recognizing the emotions the story generates within the storyteller, as well as the emotions that the teller is trying to impart on the audience. Balancing between the maudlin and the bland to achieve greater connection
- **Finding the moment:** stories have pivotal moments, where the storyteller experienced life change, and capitalizing on those moments is key to engaging the audience and getting across the story's insights.
- **Seeing your story:** Taking full advantage of the digital storytelling format, using imagery - whether explicit depictions of story components, or imagery intended to convey implicit messages to enhance the story.
- **Hearing your story:** The recorded voice of the story teller is what distinguishes a "digital story" from a "narrated slideshow", and it's critical to make best use of it, as well as consider other aspects like whether it should be used in isolation or with music or other audio.
- **Assembling the story:** Subsequent to identifying the tone and overall fundamentals of the story, it's critical to determine how you will structure the story, and determine how the audio and video components will fit together. Lots of planning is required, and tools like storyboarding and scripting can be used. The classical components of a traditional story are as applicable in digital storytelling as they are in literature, and can be considered when structuring.
- **Sharing your story:** Ultimately, the intended distribution of the story affects the contents of the story - and vice versa. The scope of the story will change depending on whether it's directed at one person or the world, and a storyteller might desire to share their story more or less broadly depending on what they put into it. Further, the outlets and targets identified by the storyteller implicitly send messages about what they are trying to do with the story.²⁸

Lambert, Joe. 2010. "Digital Storytelling Cookbook."

²⁸ Lambert, *Digital Storytelling*, 53-69

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55368c08e4b0d419e1c011f7/t/56fc1f2d8259b56455879c16/1459363690672/cookbook_full.pdf. Digital Diner Press/Creative Commons.

The Cookbook is given to participants as a detailed guide before participation in the digital storytelling workshop. It goes over the basics of digital storytelling such as narrative, narration and sound, and how images help tell to story visually. It also offers helpful questions for the participant to stay focused or get over obstacles.

Meeks, Stephanie and Kevin Murphy, *The Past and Future City: How Historic Preservation is*

Reviving American Communities. Washington, DC, Island Press, 2016.

Stephanie Meeks is the CEO of The National Trust for Historic Preservation, the leading nonprofit historic preservation agency in the country. This book offers insights into how preservation can be used in various ways for social change and details the tools to do it. However, it does not address continuing issues in preservation, but rather paints them as things in the past that preservationists have moved beyond.

Kaufman, Ned. *Place, Race and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation*.

New York: Routledge, 2009.

Kaufman defines “the term ‘story sites’ as broadly inclusive of historical sites, cultural sites, and sites of social value. [These historic places bring] socially valuable stories to mind: stories of history, tradition, and shared memory.”²⁹ Story sites, much like individual buildings, compose larger “storyscapes” like historic landscapes. “Neighborhood storyscapes are not purely a matter of individual creation and experience. Neighborhoods have histories that are represented by places.”³⁰ Kaufman emphasizes the narratives that people have in association to places. Historic places in particular conjure up meaningful and significant stories. These places are physical reminders of the past. They are the setting for a whole neighborhood of people’s memories. “Everyone has a personal storyscape. The sites within it are associated with important events or episodes. . .personal storyscapes may include buildings of recognized architectural value but will almost certainly include sites whose importance is not obvious to others and that indeed hardly seem to be ‘sites’ at all.”³¹ Often, preservationists care about these same story sites and they are often listed on the National Register of Historic Places. However, sometimes their significance is not as recognizable to preservationists because one may not know their historic and *cultural* significance without knowing the stories behind them.

Historic preservation policy revolves around the criterion for The National Register of Historic Places. The integrity criterion places a lot of significance on “whether a property(s) today

²⁹ Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 38.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 48.

³¹ Kaufman, 42-43.

reflects the spatial organization, physical components, and historic associations that it attained during the period of significance. While not inflexible, the integrity criterion obviously favors sites with a precisely definable and datable historical significance...over sites of broader association with community culture or tradition. It also prizes continuity of material and design over continuity of use or association.”³²

Page, Max. *Why Preservation Matters*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016.

Page is a historic preservationist much like Stephanie Meeks, but puts a critical eye on historic preservation. He emphasizes moving past antiquated interpretations of older structures and cultural landscapes. He is also one of few preservationists who addresses historic preservation through a social justice lens.

StoryCenter, <https://www.youtube.com/user/CenterOfTheStory>

This is StoryCenter’s YouTube channel. I watched several digital stories in order to understand the process, and examine the aesthetic qualities of videos, which I felt worked versus those, which did not work. Other qualities I took note of were; the use of sound, cadence of the narration, transitions, visual effects, mood and tone set by colors. This underscored what I looked for in researching the video editing software. The storyboarding, ultimately, is up to the participant. It is my job to make their story, photos, and requests flow well and represent their intentions.

Appendix

Digital Storytelling Guide

Before you start:

- No more than 20 photos
- 2-3 page script
- This is your personal story that only you can tell. Even though we are talking about place, you are the author of this story.
- Tell the story the way you would naturally, just talking.

Primary Guiding Questions:

- What is a significant place in your community?
- Why is this place special to you?
- What do you want people to know about it?

Components of a Digital Story:

Digital stories contain multiple visual and audio layers.

³² Kaufman, 64

The visual layers are:

- The composition of a single image
 - The combination of multiple images within a single frame, either through collage or fading over time
- The juxtaposition of a series of images over time
 - Movement applied to a single image, either by panning or zooming or the juxtaposition of a series of cropped details from the whole image
- The use of text on screen in relation to visuals, spoken narration, or sound

The audio layers are:

- Recorded voice-over
- Recorded voice-over in relation to sound, either music or ambient sound
- Music alone or in contrast to another piece of music

To Start:

What is the story you want to tell?

What do you think your story means?

Why this story?

Why now?

What makes it your version of the story?

Who is it for?

Who is it to?

What does this story show about who you are?

The difficult questions to answer if you feel stuck:

- What makes it your version of the story?
- How does this story show who you are?
- How does this story show why you are who you are?

What is the moment?

-Stories can have a lot of moving parts. However, when conveying insights and emotions. When you find what your story **means**, there is always a moment. This can be challenging to find.

Questions that can help:

- What was the moment when things changed?
- Were you aware of it at the time?
- If not, what was the moment you became aware that things had changed?
- Is there more than one possible moment to choose from?
- If so, do they convey different meanings?
- Which most accurately conveys the meaning in your story?

Visuals:

What images come to mind when recalling the moment of change in the story?

What images come to mind for other parts of the story?

Why this image?

What is it conveying to you?

Is the meaning explicit or implicit? (Does the image tell the audience something that you don't need to actually say?)

Would the audience be able to understand the story's meaning without this image?

Notes From StoryCenter about Story:

“Within every community, and within every shared experience, there are many different ideas of what it means to disclose information. Therefore, knowing your intended audience can shape the emotional content of your story. The degree of emotional content is also culturally specific, as storytellers are familiar with the codes and clues within their own communities. When a storyteller trusts that they are listening deeply to their own heart and imagines the thoughtful appreciation of a specific audience, they will share what is appropriate to share.”

“Compelling stories reproduce the insight and experience of the storyteller while prompting the audience to ask questions about their own experiences and look for larger truths. Compelling storytellers construct scenes to show how change happened, how they dealt with it, what they were like before the change, and what they are like after. A storyteller sharing their insight within a story says to the audience, in essence: This is what has happened and this is what I have learned. By building a scene around the moment of change, the storyteller is “showing,” rather than “telling.”

From StoryCenter about Creativity and Audience:

“Don't give away too much information all at once. Allow your audience to enjoy the challenge. And rather than establishing a chronological telling of events with the moment of change positioned as the story's climax, you might instead try moving the moment of change to the beginning with little or no context, which may leave the moment hanging to pique the interest of the audience, and then go back and fill in more and more details and scenes and allow the audience to piece together the meaning and resolution. However, to do this you need to pay special attention to your audience's experience.”

*This guide is based on StoryCenter's “Digital Storytelling Cookbook”
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Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor, Sue Eleuterio, for guiding and supporting me throughout this project. Thank you for inspiring me to see the potential for social justice and community change in my work.

I would like to thank Roxanne Kymaani, my committee member, for your support, challenging me in the best ways possible, and showing me the things about myself that I could not see.

I would like to thank Becky Gorman, my outside (local) committee member, for your patience, wit, and insight. You believed in this project before I did, and I could not have done this without you.

I would especially like to thank Nora Cole, Don Haag, and Carrye Jones. Thank you for sharing countless hours with me sharing your moving stories. I have learned so much from you. I cannot express how appreciative I am of your generosity.