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Building History: Public History Students make Community History More Accessible through Building History Projects

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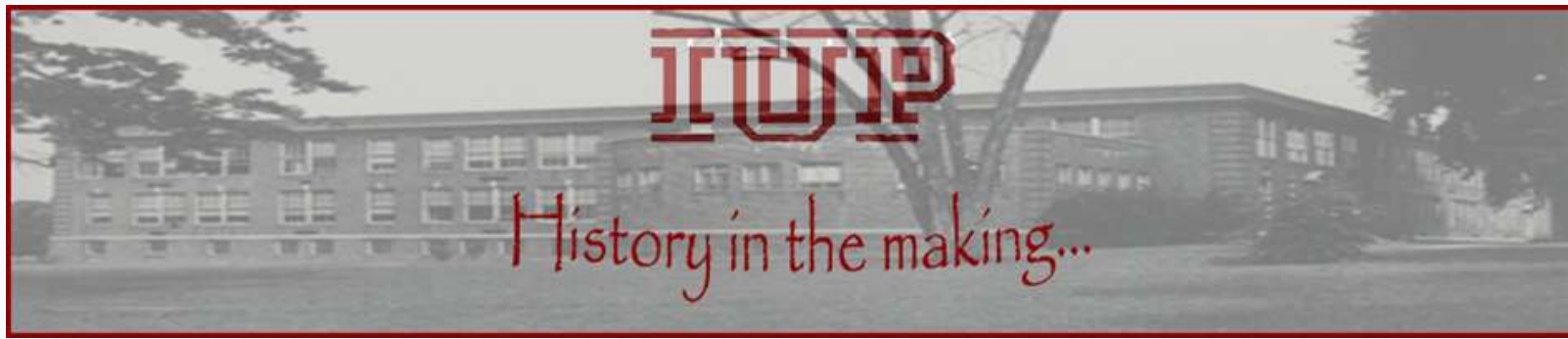
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Building History:
Assisting Local Historical Societies, Inspiring the Next Generation of Public
Historians, and Contributing to the Historical Record through Campus-
Community Collaborations



- In the Spring of 2018 undergraduate students in a Public History Class at Indiana University of Pennsylvania investigated the history of local buildings on the Boro's historic Philadelphia Street.
- The Director of the Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County, a Public History Professor, and Librarian participated in the development of the class
- All contributed to the learning experience that they all felt benefited each of them and the community.



THE CERTIFICATE AND CLASS



- **Public History Certificate Program description:**

- As a historian, you can help the public understand the people, places, and events that made an impact on our history, bringing the past to life.
- This program will prepare you to present historical information in a way that inspires public interest. Your courses will build your understanding of the collection, preservation, and presentation of historical information.
- The 18-credit certificate complements majors in related fields such as anthropology, communications media, and education. Completion of the certificate will prepare students to pursue positions in libraries, museums, archives, national parks, heritage sites, media, and corporations.

- **HIST 420 Introduction to Public History ~ 3 credits.**

- Required class for the Public History Certificate
- Students learn that one of the roles of a public historian is to act as a bridge between the public and their past. By completing this project - engaging with a number of different professionals and community members - develop traits needed for professional conduct.

THE ASSIGNMENT

- Students were asked to produce a report documenting the history of a building including:
 - Construction date, chronology of ownership and occupancy, architectural style, and any other relevant information they could locate to tell the story of the building
 - Historical significance of the building and any owners/occupants, where the building “places” in the Indiana community, anything unique about the building itself and an argument for its preservation, if there is one to be made
 - Photographs, maps, any images to help tell the story
 - A presentation (using PowerPoint or like format) with team sharing what was gathered
 - A reflective essay of experience with the project. This should be between two and three pages long. Address questions like:
 - What did you learn while doing the project, about yourself and about the public historian’s role in the community and even the value of local history?
 - Include the steps of your research process that will serve as a guide to future researchers

LIBRARIAN INVOLVEMENT

- **Course Preparation Assistance**

- Met with professor prior to the semester to help professor plan for the class
- Did research on similar public history/service learning related assignments and shared with the professor
- Provided input on the development of objectives, mutual benefits, means of reflection, and assessment techniques and assisted with preparation of IRB
- Discussed content and timing of possible librarian research support sessions including classroom visits as instructor prepares syllabus

- **Classroom visits**

- At the beginning of the semester she set up LibGuide with links to resources to support research that will also provide links to student projects when completed. House and Building History Guide: <https://libraryguides.lib.iup.edu/c.php?g=792303>
- First class visit. Met with students to introduce resources for research calling upon their prior knowledge and asking them to work in teams to come up with lists of resources. Show them the LibGuide we would be building and described the building history handout we hoped to create. We also did a reflection activity relating to their expectations/reactions to assignment and how the librarian might be able to help in individuals, small group, and full class discussion.
- Second class visit. Once they chose their building and began trying to research their property, she did a reflection activity on how things are going and barriers they were finding.. with individual paper surveys, then full class discussion. She then shared published local history articles that offered similar treatment of building histories, showed them how to mine the bibliographies, and demonstrated some of the databases that were relevant, but a little hard to navigate. She highlighted resources judged most needed by students based on their input.
- Last class meeting: Librarian and historical society director view and comment upon the final presentation.

LIBRARIAN INVOLVEMENT

- Work directly with Student Groups
 - Midway through the semester student teams met with librarian to show her what they had so far and get advice to assist them in their research process
 - End-of-the-semester student groups met with librarian to build their part of the LibGuide.
 - Emails were also exchanged to deliver materials for LibGuide, including a PDF of final presentation and their list of research steps.
- After the Semester was Over
 - Librarian, Public History Professor, and Historical Society Director met to reflect on the experience and discuss future plans
 - Librarian put final projects in LibGuide and compiled research guide from student suggestions

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Students will be able to:
 - Describe the various aspects of public history
 - Analyze what the study and practice of public history entail
 - Analyze the concept of public or “shared memory.”
 - Evaluate the historian’s role in facilitating public or shared memory
 - Evaluate the role and obligations of a public history professional
 - Apply skills relevant to the practice of public history such as digital and visual literacy skill, archival, museum, and oral history skills.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

- Career exploration and discipline related research skill development
 - “I knew archival work was an essential aspect of public history, and I was excited to see what all went into the part of public history. This project helped me establish necessary skills I need to be a successful historian.”
 - “Taking the introduction to public history was one of the best decisions I have made because it gave me an idea of what I, hopefully, have to look forward to in my future.”
- Appreciation of work of public historians and those who assist in public history research
 - “The role of a public historian is so valuable to a community’s identity and being able to impact a community in a positive way is rewarding. I think that being able to blend the qualities of a traditional historian with that of a public historian, is one of the most important things I will take away from my college experience in general.”
 - “This project really opened my eyes to how important public historians are and how important their jobs are in making sure artifacts, objects, buildings are preserved and remain that way. I learned that being a public historian is very difficult because of all of the research and organizing that needs to be done, especially with this project.”
 - “We had to get a lot of help from the people who work there because the further we went back the more difficult it was to find the deeds we needed to fill in the blanks. Luckily the employees were very understanding and helped us quite a bit”
- Greater awareness of how everyday encounters are linked to an understanding of history
 - After having completed this course, I see history in so many more places. I never know where I might see something that could have a fascinating past. I notice details now that I previously would have overlooked. For example, when I walk down Philadelphia Street, I see dates and names on buildings that I never noticed before, despite having walked or driven down this street many, many times. After our building projects, many of these names mean something to me, and tell me a little about who had once owned the lot. This class was fascinating in so many ways, but one of the most interesting for me was discovering that everything has a past and everything has the potential to tell us about it.
- Community contributions
 - “What I liked most about this project was the fact that hopefully one day the building can be saved if needed because of the all of the research and solid arguments my partner and I created as to why this building should be kept/not demolished.”
 - “...the thought that the information my partner and I presented could be used in order to save a building that I pass everyday on my way to school was fulfilling.”

DELIVERABLES

- Five group presentations sharing results of historical research of local houses available via a LibGuide at:
<https://libraryguides.lib.iup.edu/c.php?g=792303>

Uncovering Your Home or Commercial Property's Unique History

Every old house has a story to tell, and learning and documenting this history will add to your appreciation of the dwelling and may even impact its resale value. The following is a list of the most useful places to begin looking for the history of your Indiana, Pa. home. It was compiled from the work of IUP Public History students in the Spring of 2018.

As long as your house has been around, the local government is likely to have been keeping records on it. Try looking in these local government offices to find information on your house, such as the chain of title of the property. Knowing who owned it and when will provide you with clues for further research.

Indiana County Recorder of Deeds Office.

The screenshot shows the 'House and Building History Research: Home' page. At the top, there is a breadcrumb trail: 'IUP Library / LibGuides / House and Building History Research / Home'. Below this is a search bar. A navigation bar contains several tabs: 'Home', 'S & T Bank Headquarters. Constructed 1907', '530 Philadelphia Street. ca. 1815', 'Mrs. C.B.M. White Building', and 'Luxenberg's Jewelers. 717 Philadelphia Street'. The main content area is divided into three columns. The left column has a 'Student Projects' section with the text: 'Access public history student research projects through topical links in crimson band across the top of the page.' The middle column has a 'Digital Archives' section with a link: 'Historical American Buildings Survey'. The right column has a 'Local Newspapers' section with a link: 'Access Newspaper Archive'. At the bottom left, there is an 'Ask a Librarian' section with the text: 'Drop by the reference desk. It is

- Uncovering Your Home or Commercial Property's Unique History research guide based upon student experience available at:
https://libraryguides.lib.iup.edu/ld.php?content_id=43491646

PARTNER REFLECTIONS

- Public History Professor
 - Believes the projects were engaging and addressed learning outcomes of the course
 - More pleased with resulting projects than with similar projects in the past.
 - Students were highly motivated
 - She will be having meetings with local and county officials over the fall to expand the projects
 - Instructor of another course in oral history was inspired by project and will do oral histories to support building histories in the fall
- Historical Society Director
 - Believes that student work will definitively help the Society's work in the future
 - Believes the project and LibGuide provide a step towards centralizing place-based local history sources and supporting future researchers and those who wish to assist them
 - Research guide and sample project will support efforts to apply for historical district designations
 - Believes the experience increased student historical awareness and the increased the likelihood that students will appreciate and support historical societies in the future
- Librarian
 - I found it challenging (I knew NOTHING about researching building history), a little anxiety producing (what if they couldn't find anything or they got too frustrated), and time consuming, but it was also really interesting and immensely gratifying
 - I think it effectively built students skills and built my skills too!!
 - I helped me to develop a closer relationship with the students than I did with other projects
 - I learned from the students. I was not aware of the history of these buildings and I am interested in local history
 - Great being part of the learning team
 - Resulting projects and research help guide developed will assist academic and community researchers in the future

Group Discussion

- How do you think this experience be improved?
- What should we do next?

Contact Us for More Information or to Offer Suggestions or Advice

- Dr. Theresa McDevitt, Government Information/Outreach Librarian, IUP Libraries, mcdevitt@iup.edu
- Dr. Jeanine Mazak-Kahne, Associate Professor of History, IUP History Department, jmkahne@iup.edu
- Jonathan Bogert, Historical and Genealogical Society of Indiana County, Director, ichistoricalsociety@gmail.com

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