

HIS 8703: Historians and Preservation (Spring 2020)

Fifty years after the U.S. National Historic Preservation Act, many would say that the field of historic preservation is due for a renovation. In Philadelphia, preservationists have declared a "demolition crisis" and pressed for municipal policy reform. Many of these preservationists themselves have faced challenges from city residents pushing them to diversify their ranks, the strategies they use, and the buildings that they seek to preserve. How can historians participate in this moment of transformation?

This question served as the springboard for Dr. Whitney Martinko's public history practicum in the Spring 2020 semester. Students learned about preservation policy, local institutions, and community engagement from class visits by Mr. Patrick Grossi, Advocacy Director for the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia, and Dr. Lynne Calamia, a Historic Preservation Board member for the Pennsylvania History and Museum Commission. Students integrated these conversations about preservation praxis with interdisciplinary readings about urban history, gentrification, and historically-informed activism to write three context statements—important tools for preserving sites associated with historically marginalized groups whose tangible pasts are underrepresented in preservation initiatives.

Eleven students in the course divided into teams that designed, researched, and wrote context statements to build knowledge about understudied elements of Philadelphia's built environment. Modeled on SurveyLA: The Los Angeles Historic Resources Survey, these context statements offered up histories rarely used to evaluate the significance of sites nominated for the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. One team delved into the history of the displacement and demolition of African American institutions, including schools, churches, hospitals, and cemeteries. Another team sought to expand interest in the centennial of the Nineteenth Amendment into a look at sites of women's suffrage campaigns, education, visual arts, and dance in the first half of the twentieth century. A third group aimed to inform redevelopment plans for the 52nd Street commercial corridor with knowledge of the street's deep history as a hub of local business, arts and culture, and activism.

In addition to collaborating on context reports, students also wrote individual journalistic articles that informed current debates over urban transformation with relevant historical research. Students learned how to pitch and write articles from guest speaker Ms. Starr Herr-Cardillo, preservation journalist and consultant, and workshopped article ideas with Mr. Michael Bixler, managing editor and communications director for *Hidden City*. To date, four students—Mary Manfredi, Chris Mengel, Moyra Schaffler, and Lori Wysong—have published articles written for the class in *HiddenCity*. These articles show how historians might think expansively about the praxis of preservation and use public writing and social media to engage a wider swath of Philadelphians in preserving places.

For student articles in *HiddenCity*, see:

Moyra Schaffler, "[The Rise and Decline of African-American Hospitals in Philadelphia](#)"

Lori Wysong, "[Cemeteries, Segregation, and the Funerals of Henry Jones](#)"

Chris Mengel, "[Taking it to the Streets: Open-Air Meetings of the 1911 Suffrage Movement in Philadelphia](#)"

Mary Manfredi, [“Moderne Landmark Deserves a ‘New Deal’ with Historic Protections”](#)