WHAT IS PROJECT: PICTURING MILWAUKEE?

Recounting stories of everyday places where we live and work can spur active engagement with others who share these spaces with us, revive interest in our built environment and encourage stewardship of this patrimony. The need for collaborative storytelling to create a public culture takes on a sense of urgency when established traditions and ways of life disappear and new ones emerge. Such is the case of Thurston Woods, a neighborhood in Milwaukee where old demographics and culture have given way to new inhabitants, economic practices and cultural life. Merely telling stories is not enough in these cases - rather citizens should be inspired to participate and contribute in a collective retelling of stories thereby producing a public discourse that is invested and engaged.

The objective of this project is to produce an inventory of sites that have historical value to this neighborhood and to provide users with interpretive ways of reading these sites. We expect that this project will increase awareness of neighborhood history and preservation of the built environment. Project: Picturing Milwaukee hopes that by providing critical tools and an interactive public forum for city officials, residents, neighborhood groups and citizens of Milwaukee, we can learn, discuss and produce stories of places that matter to all these people.

This project is significant because it will promote an easily accessible and free public forum for urban residents to share, interpret, learn and disseminate information about urban places as public culture. This project is innovative because it focuses on making expert ways of reading the city available to non-specialist users thereby seeking to create a critically informed citizenry who may serve as advocates and stewards of our urban built heritage.
WHO ARE WE?
The Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures (BLC) collaborative project at UW Milwaukee and Madison is an interdisciplinary research track concentrating on the examination of the physical, cultural and social aspects of our built environment. Fieldwork plays an important role in this program and a cross-campus fieldwork school is a special offering of this project. Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures field schools provide students with an immersive experience in the field recording of the built environment and cultural landscapes and an opportunity to learn how to write history literally "from the ground up."

At BLC we write about stuff - cities, forests, buildings and objects - just about anything we can touch and hold. Material objects are powerful not only because they fill up our world, our homes and ultimately our landfills, but also because we desire and reproduce them incessantly, creatively and carefully.

Of all objects we love, places hold special significance for us because we inhabit and occupy them. Places are also repositories of stories, dreams, memories and feelings - all those complex intangibles that make us who we are. Our identity and histories are place-based. Our bodies move in and occupy place. Our actions take place in a location and during such action-filled moments we become who we are.

WHAT DO WE DO?
In 1978, Hayden White wrote about the art of writing histories. He argued that historiography is a poetic exercise. Historians plot stories; they highlight certain aspects and downplay others. Histories follow certain underlining and prefigured narrative structures within which we understand, read and reproduce our reality. Yet, each story, told differently, bent and crooked, follows some basic logic. History repeats itself in its telling, over and over, year after year.

Telling stories is so important because our stories spawn new ones. The careful craft of a storyteller emphasizes leaving loose ends. Loose ends let our minds soar like a kite; stories set us free. There are three kinds of stories in this exhibit. First are the stories of homes and homemakers. Home is more than the nuts, bolts, joists and joints that define a shelter. It is a symbolic space of ownership, memories, tears and love. It grounds residents to a piece of land and a lifetime of memories. Second, there are "community" stories. Residents fondly tell tales of a past long gone. Streets full of friends. Safe. Familiar. And now lost forever. The tales of loss are laments of a world that has changed irreversibly. They are also tales that reflect fear of the other, the unfamiliar and the unhomely, slowly creeping up the street onto one's doorstep. These stories remind us that our community changes everyday and we have to constantly remake ourselves in order to belong in this ever-changing world. The third set of stories tells us about plants, animals, sun, wind and water. These stories narrate how we belong in this world of beauty and love - fearful of nature's might and destructive power, obsessive about our relationship to this huge ecosystem. Nature is not something outside us - it is what we make and remake everyday and it is that larger home where we belong.
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**Project: Picturing Milwaukee-Thurston Woods**

In the summer of 2012, students, scholars and affiliates of Buildings-Landscapes-Cultures, worked with residents and community organizations from the Thurston Woods neighborhood in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in order to explore, document and examine historic buildings and cultural landscapes of this area. They created site reports that became part of the historical record of Wisconsin. Students received an immersive experience in the field recording the built environment. They received training in site documentation including photography, measured drawings, digital documentation, audio-visual production; historic interpretation of buildings and landscapes, focusing on how to “read” buildings within their material, political, social, cultural and economic contexts; and primary source research including oral history, archival research, architectural analysis.

A number of nationally recognized humanities scholars directing portions of this school, including Jeffrey E. Klee, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation; Michael H. Frisch, Professor and Senior Research Scholar, University at Buffalo; Judith Weiland, Director of Operations, The Randforce Associates, LLC; Jasmine Alinder, Associate Professor of History, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee; Michael Gordon, Professor of History, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee; Erin Dorbin, of Hey Man Cool, Digital History Productions; and Arijit Sen, Associate Professor of Architecture, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee.

This field school is sponsored by Wisconsin Humanities Council, the UWM School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Agape Community Center, Thurston Woods, Cultures and Communities at UWM, Department of History, School of Letters and Sciences at UWM, Historic Milwaukee Inc., and the Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at UWM.

**Why Thurston Woods?**

Our long-term professional goal is to promote civic engagement by disseminating stories that demonstrate the power of place in sustaining culture, citizenship and identity in American cities. We chose to use the Thurston Woods neighborhood of Milwaukee as our test case because of its unique history, geographical context and easy access. The history of Thurston Woods exemplifies Milwaukee's history. Milwaukee, like many other cities across the Midwest, is known as an urban industrial center. Increasingly populated by waves of working class immigrants during the 19th and 20th centuries, Milwaukee's history is replete with stories of struggles around class, labor and industry. By the turn of the 21st century, much of the sustaining industry had disappeared and Milwaukee became a “post-industrial” city in decline. The social consciousness and public discourses of the past century are no longer relevant to Milwaukee's current citizens. When considered together with its segregated residential and settlement patterns, we confront an alarming lack of public forums that can unite and bring together the diverse residents of the city. Although festivals, parades and ethnic events provide civic opportunities to unite us, these events are seasonal, increasingly commercially oriented and less accessible to all citizens.

Thurston Woods has a rich history. The neighborhood has a collection of vernacular housing types, including Arts and Crafts, Cape Cod, Craftsman and Mid-Century Modern. The Berryland Public Housing Development was originally built for veterans returning from the Second World War. Other local spaces of historical and cultural significance include Agape Community Center, Christ Memorial Lutheran School, Jared C. Bruce Academy and Thurston Woods Campus School. Thurston Woods is also a perfect case study for a park system. Examples such as McGovern Park, Schoenecker Park, Smith Park and Havenwoods State Forest show how parks reflect our culture's changing values and outlook towards spaces of recreation, wilderness, leisure, health, commodity and spirituality. According to the Milwaukee Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative, “The neighborhood is culturally diverse, located minutes from downtown and offers well-built, affordable homes. Its quiet nature and off-the-beaten-path location has made Thurston Woods a well-kept secret.”
The Thurston Woods Neighborhood History project preceded the field school. It was conducted by Monica Frost and was an effort to link research and history within a local community. This section is an excerpt from Frost's research. Her project "Neighborhood Histories" is an effort to link research and history within a local community. Often we see history as static information disassociated with our everyday lives. Museums, historic sites and historic markers are much needed ways of disseminating information to the public, but often their content overlooks the relationship between history and our modern lives. When we explore the places where we live, we discover a wealth of information about ourselves: past, present and future. Neighborhood histories influence the way we look at our environment and the way we understand the world around us.
1900s
Streetcar Line 12 reaches Silver Spring and 35th St.

1920s
North Milwaukee Annexed

1930s
Motor Bus Routes introduced in addition to streetcars

1940s
Berryland Housing constructed north of Florist Avenue

1950s
Project Nike Ajax Missle Base set up in Havenwoods

2000s
Agape Center promotes neighborhood projects

Thurston Woods Development
COMPARING FORMAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THURSTON WOODS STREETS
Whether the extension of the street grid creates new communities or the creation of a "main drag" connects areas of the city, streets often establish boundaries while providing larger connections. Neighborhood streets can take different forms. They can be main streets, side-streets, backstreets, or alleyways, each serving its own set of needs and activities. Lower traffic volume and narrower widths give us a greater ability to share the road with vehicles. Streets can be closed for block parties, get you to your driveway, and discretely connect you to a larger network of streets. Medium streets function at the neighborhood scale. They provide efficient ways to get from one end of the neighborhood to the other. They support smaller areas of commerce that bind the neighborhood. Busy thoroughfares discourage foot traffic and street crossing. The high traffic areas become a city highway, taking you along the length or width of the city and extending to cities beyond. One such street is Cedarburg Road (presently Milwaukee's Teutonia Avenue) which evolved from a farming road to one of the city's major thoroughfares. This road began for ease of travel well before the area was incorporated into the city and its grid. The higher traffic pattern also determines the nature of the streetscape. Billboards and other large scale signs line the street, advertising products and businesses so that they can be easily identified by people driving their cars or riding the bus.