

2020

Twitter Talk for National Council on Public History 2020

Michelle Hamilton
Western University

Ariel Beaujot
Western University

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Citation of this paper:

Hamilton, Michelle and Beaujot, Ariel, "Twitter Talk for National Council on Public History 2020" (2020).
Hear, Here Conference Papers. 3.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/hearhereconference/3>

1/21 #NCPH2020 #s49



2/21 #NCPH2020 #s49



In 2014-2015, *Hear, Here*, a grassroots storytelling project began in downtown La Crosse Wisconsin. Undergraduate students under Beaujot set out to capture stories told by historically underrepresented and marginalized people. www.hearherelacrosse.org #NCPH2020 #s49 3/21



Hear, Here functions via orange street signs with phone numbers. When visitors call the number they hear a story excerpted from an oral history which happened in the exact location where they stand. #NCPH2020 #s49 4/21



Politicians, business owners insisted 2 stories about difficulties experienced by Black men be removed. This struggle precipitated 2 years of research that demonstrated that La Crosse was a Sundown Town, a city that had maintained itself as white since the 1890s. #NCPH2020 #s49 5/21

As the downtown gentrified, there came a feeling amongst some that businesses and people who previously inhabited the downtown--including tattoo parlors, sex shops, and bars frequented by People of Colour--should be forgotten and in some cases explicitly removed. #NCPH2020 #s49 6/21

With the help of various community organizations the Mayor apologized for historical injustices and promised to work on diversity and inclusion in the community. #NCPH2020 #s49 7/21

In 2018, stories about a statue titled “Hiawatha” drew controversy. They gave voice to an Indigenous man who speaks about the psychological harm caused by mascots. The family of the artist who created the statue ultimately agreed to move it to private land. #NCPH2020 #s49 8/21



These examples show that oral history can be active history, or a catalyst for change. We now explore the second site of the project -- London, Canada -- and 2 possible sites of friction and change. #NCPH2020 #s49 9/21

In 2019 Beaujot and Hamilton and her MA students paired to bring *Hear, Here* to London, Canada. Like in Wisconsin, we choose a neighborhood with diverse ethnicities and that is undergoing gentrification. #NCPH2020 #s49 10/21



Stories which might generate change include those about Victoria Hospital, plagued by conflict between developers and heritage advocates and the Fugitive Slave Chapel, stalled in a battle over who interprets the site, white heritage workers or the Black community. #NCPH2020 #s49 11/21

The Fugitive Slave Chapel was built in 1848 by and for those who had escaped enslavement and free People of Colour who had immigrated to London, Canada. #NCPH2020 #s49 12/21



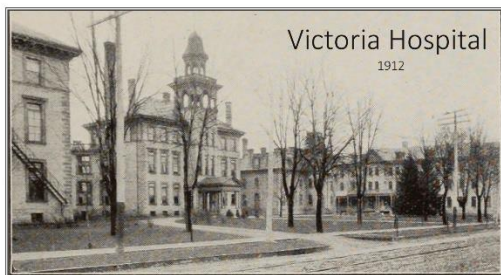
Under a demolition permit in 2013, the chapel was saved by a group of predominantly white heritage workers and the predominantly Black Beth Emmanuel British Methodist Episcopal Church congregation. #NCPH2020 #s49 13/21

By 2018 heritage advocates and the Beth Emmanuel members came to an impasse, resulting in the dissolution of the group. Reverend Delta McNeish said they were excluded from the project. #NCPH2020 #s49 14/21

While heritage workers wanted to create a museum about the history of slavery in Canada, McNeish was excited for the extra space it would provide for the 200 meals served each week to her community. #NCPH2020 #s49 15/21

She also saw it as a way to connect community. <https://soundcloud.com/hearhere-london/reverend-delta-mcneish-all-parts-of-trimmed-audio> #NCPH2020 #s49 16/21

Demolition of Victoria Hospital finished in 2019 as *Hear, Here* launched. #NCPH2020 #s49 17/21



Local artist Matthew Trueman photographed its demolition. He summarized the importance of the hospital to London this way: <https://soundcloud.com/hearhere-london/matthew-trueman-trimmed> #NCPH2020 #s49 18/21

Heritage advocates unsuccessfully advocated for a heritage conservation district but managed to save 3 of many buildings. The city asked developers to adaptively reuse these buildings but allowed demolition of the rest. #NCPH2020 #s49 19/21



Today, there is also controversy over how the property will be used. Will it be a site of expensive condos which promote gentrification or will it be affordable housing, more consistent with the traditional working-class demography of the neighbourhood? #NCPH2020 #s49 20/21

In London and Wisconsin, oral history as active history demonstrates flashpoints of ethnic diversity and gentrification. #NCPH2020 #s49 21/21