

Adaptive Reuse, Community History, and Archival Practice

A White Paper
and
Project Accomplishments for:

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The functional recycling of buildings, sites, and architectural features is a practice as old as architecture itself. This in part because, as Sally Stone notes in her recent book, *Undoing Buildings: Adaptive Reuse and Cultural Memory*, structures have a way of outliving specific functions.² The practice has also long been a way of negotiating continuity and change: new functional wine in old structural bottles.

The use and reuse of buildings over long periods of time entails multiple practices and purposes. Some buildings are intended to or develop a special cultural, ideological, or social status. Thus, societies attempt to maintain them and prevent their demolition or falling into

¹ This white paper reflects the input from a number of people who worked together on adaptive reuse projects undertaken over the last six years through the UNC Digital Innovation Lab and Community Histories Workshop, in particular: Nicole Coscolluela, Project Coordinator, Rocky Mount Mills Project; Sarah Almond, Assistant Director, Community Histories Workshop (CHW); Elijah Gaddis, Assistant Professor of History, Auburn University, and Co-Director, CHW; Ina Dixon, PHD candidate, American Studies, UNC; Seth Kotch, Co-Founder, CHW, and Professor of American Studies, UNC-Chapel Hill; Bryan Giemza, Former Director, UNC Southern Historical Collection; Nicholas Graham, UNC University Archivist; Lisa Gregory, Digital NC; Lucas Kelley, graduate research fellow, CHW; Bernetae Reed, Community-Driven Archives Team, Southern Historical Collection; Evan Covington Chavez, Project Manager, Rocky Mount Mills, Capitol Broadcasting Company; Rob Shapard, Lecturer, UNC Dept. of History and Faculty Research Fellow, CHW; Traci Thompson, Local History and Genealogical Librarian, Braswell Memorial Library, Rocky Mount, NC; Christie Norris, Director, Carolina K-12; Mary D. Williams, gospel singer extraordinaire; John Mebane, former president, Rocky Mount Mills; Julie Davis, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Digital Innovation Lab. Terry Mulligan, Rory Dowling, and staff of the UNC Development Finance Initiative Many community members in each of the towns where we have worked contributed their memories, stories, and family heirlooms. We are grateful for them all.

² Sally Stone, *UnDoing Buildings: Adaptive Reuse and Cultural Memory* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

disuse. In some cases buildings have retained a cultural role and function across time and despite social and political changes: pagan temples are converted into Christian churches; churches are converted into mosques. In some cases only elements of a pre-existing architectural structure have been preserved and incorporated into a new structure—its prior use obscured or erased. There is the modern impulse to attempt to return a venerable building to the way it looked at the time of its erection or some other notable moment of its architectural past, which can mean removing evidence of changes made at some subsequent point in its history.

The meanings of these practices exceed their narrow definitions in building design and engineering. Rather they propagate multiple terms, resonating across a range of disciplines and practices, which, as Liliane Wong notes in her 2016 book, *Adaptive Reuse: Extending the Lives of Buildings* “exist in multiplicity, with nuanced and, at times, disparate definitions (and opinionated viewpoints) for the same word.”³

Indeed Wong provides a sixteen-page historical glossary of terms related to, but not substitutes for, “adaptive reuse,” including:

adaptation, addition, alteration, conservation, conversion, extension, maintenance
modernization, preservation, reconstruction, refurbishment, rehabilitation, relocation
remodeling, renewal, renovation, repair, replication, restoring, retrofitting.⁴

Stone engages with and responds to this lexicon, but she also provides a succinct yet capacious working definition of adaptive reuse, which will serve as the terminological starting point for our purposes. Adaptive reuse:

implies a change of function of a building whose previous use is now obsolete. And therefore it’s changed to accommodate a new function, with new occupiers with different needs and priorities. This could be the conversion of a consecrated church into apartments, or an industrial warehouse into a museum.⁵

Stone’s definition can be further parsed into its contributing components.

- **Change:** Adaptive reuse responds to a disruption, a discontinuity, a transformation that fundamentally alters the meanings of a building within the contexts of its intended and/or conventional purposes, users, and value. Adaptive reuse is not a smooth process of transition from one use to another. It responds to a violent and ineluctable wrenching apart of space and function. It might literally arise as the result of a cascade of technological transformation (the proverbial buggy-whip factory), but, as was the case of

³ Liliane Wong, *Adaptive Reuse: Extending the Lives of Buildings* (Boston: Birkhäuser, 2017), 8.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13-29.

⁵ Stone, *UnDoing Buildings*, 4.

the textile industry in the American South, also the evacuation of the spaces of traditional manufacture and its apparently permanent geographic and economic relocation to other places in the world.

- **Prior Function:** Adaptive reuse responds to a profound disconnection between the space of a building and the use/s for which that space was designed or evolved to make possible and sustain (see “Obsolescence” below).
- **Building:** Stone locates the “unit” of adaptive reuse at the level of the building, which is conceptually useful in several respects. Later in her book, Stone reminds us that each building is different, and thus each adaptive reuse project is different. Also, as she puts it, “the circumstance of that difference means that each [building] has an individual tale to tell, something that describes the narrative of its existence.”⁶ Each building also has a particular “rapport” with its environment, which is not fixed but changes in relation to the building’s history, that of the people who occupy it, and the surrounding community.

Wong uses the metaphor of the hermit crab to talk about buildings as “hosts” for particular occupants and functions. A building defines spaces through which different “guests” circulate.⁷ The aggregate interior space of a building establishes perimeters and boundaries between itself and the physical and social world beyond its doors and gates.

Building also defines the level at which adaptive reuse developers, architects, and designers operate. It represents the stubborn persistence of structure and physical precedence that condition the architect’s imagination. It is that which must be owned or “controlled” in order for the adaptive reuse development enterprise to commence. It establishes how in square feet its value will be measured. Its unique historicity is what is at stake in the designation of official landmark status, which, in turn, can be monetized as federal, state, and local tax credits.

Buildings are uniquely marked by their histories and by the people who made them. Stone turns to Walter Benjamin: “To live is to leave traces.”

- **Obsolescence:** Obsolescence is the exhaustion of use in relation to value. It renders what was once productivity as superfluous and unsustainable routine.

Obsolescence strips a building of its identity and meaning. For example, a mill is a place where workers operate machinery in the production of what will eventually become goods. When the mill closes, everyone who once worked there is stripped of his or her identity. The machines—the mill’s real assets—are the first things to go. With no machines and no one to work them, mills become useless spaces. As architectural plans and historic photographs reveal, mills are purpose-built and industry specific. They might

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁷ Wong, *Adaptive Reuse*, 104.

be adapted to produce different types of textiles, for example (a cotton sheeting plant becomes a tire-cord plant), but a textile mill is unlikely to be easily repurposed by its owners as an office building or a department store.

Capitalism creates industrial buildings; it also consigns them to the status of ruins. Modernity has no place (one could say “no use”) for uselessness. Cotton mills in the South were once icons of progress. Small towns vied with each other to attract entrepreneurs willing to build a mill. In the process towns acquired a completely new type of building and a new set of economic relationships to which their inhabitants were subject. Farmers became mill “operatives.” In some small towns, the mill was, effectively, the defining feature of that town, with the name of the mill and the name of the town becoming synonymous.

When the last mills closed in the 1980s or 1990s, towns, people, and buildings lost their usefulness and their identities. When it became apparent that there were no late twentieth century entrepreneurs in most towns to reconstruct, refurbish, rehabilitate, remodel, renew, renovate, repair, restore, or retrofit the buildings in relation to their original industrial purpose, these structures were abandoned. They became industrial ruins and blights on the local landscape.

- **New Functions:** Adaptive reuse is a transformative intervention in the life of a building. It is a response to the building as industrial ruin by an entity with the resources and vision to be able to impose a possible future on it.

Rodolfo Machado refers to adaptive reuse as an “architectural palimpsest”—the architectural equivalent of writing over on the same page, or painting over the same canvas in such a way that previous inscriptions are still visible. The building’s past is what he calls a “package of sense”—accumulated meanings that reuse can underscore, re-mark, point toward, or efface. But the deeper layers of the building’s history are still there beneath even the most resolute attempts to rub them out.⁸ Stone argues that the repurposed building can symbolize the transition from one culture to another.⁹ In communities defined by a mill or factory for generations, reuse is sometimes cast as a sign of civic rebirth.

These new functions are themselves responses to a new set of needs and priorities, which could have instigated the adaptive reuse process to begin with. Adaptive reuse inevitably produces a tension between the prior functions of the building and those envisioned for its future. Stone provides two examples as a part of her definition of adaptive reuse: “This could be the conversion of a deconsecrated church into apartments, or an industrial warehouse into a museum.” Both point to the question of who gets to

⁸ Rodolfo Machado, “Old Buildings as Palimpsest,” *Progressive Architecture* 57: 11 (1976), 46-49.

⁹ Stone, *UnDoing Buildings*, 74.

decide which buildings will be repurposed for what functions—whose needs and priorities are paramount.

The “Place” of Adaptive Reuse in the Post-Industrial Era

For the most part, the processes that together constitute adaptive reuse have been occurring around the world for millennia. Adaptive reuse has gone on alongside both the erection of new buildings and the demolition of old ones. Over the past half century, however, adaptive reuse has moved from the periphery of architecture, design, and construction closer to the center. It now represents a majority of all building work in Western countries.¹⁰

Much of the scholarly discourse on adaptive reuse, particularly in Europe, revolves around the strand of this process characterized by “poetic and artistic design intervention in heritage sites.” This discursive focus is a response to the increased involvement of “starchitects” in such high-profile adaptive reuse initiatives as Carlo Scarpa’s re-use of Castelvecchio in Verona as a sculpture museum. However, environmental concerns have opened scholarly attention to adaptive reuse projects that respond to more “quotidian” social needs and priorities.¹¹

Ed Hollis notes that the construction and building operation industries account for nearly half of CO₂ emissions in industrialized countries. Also of environmental concern is the proportion of the surface area of urban spaces covered by new building footprints. As he puts it:

Quite simply, if we want to save energy, cut emissions and maintain a habitable environment, we shouldn’t be doing buildings, we should be challenging the business as usual cycle of the construction and demolition of new buildings, and instead exploring new ways of undoing old ones. The idea that building reuse can be a positive and beneficial approach to the development of the built environment is no longer a radical idea. It is not something that is considered when other options are not available.¹²

The transition from the industrial era to the post-industrial era across the Western world provides developers, government entities, architects, and designers with a huge supply of huge buildings to be undone and redone.

Successive industrial “revolutions” in Europe and North America from the mid-18th to the mid-20th centuries were powered by hundreds of thousands of mills and factories. Some of them have been demolished, but many survive as “ghost” buildings in the urban landscape. As Stone

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹¹ Wong, *Adaptive Reuse*, 6.

¹² Ed Hollis, Foreword to Stone, *Undoing Buildings*, xv.

notes, “post-industrial society no longer needs these huge edifices but, given their position within the collective memory of the population, does not want to demolish them.”¹³

Of course, the dynamic of industrial building construction and factory closure continues, but over the past twenty years (since 2001, when China joined the World Trade Organization), some 60,000 factories have closed in the U.S.¹⁴ The effects of de-industrialization on the built environment ripple through urban spaces, large and small. When mills and factories close, the neighborhoods around them also decline: schools, places of worship, and small businesses can no longer survive. For example, changing cultural patterns and urban demographics have led to an “epidemic” of church closures in the U.S.—an estimated 6000 to 10,000 each year.¹⁵ In 1929-30 there were 248,000 public schools in the US yet in 2015-16 there were only 98,000. That year alone some 1160 schools closed, affecting 195,000 students.¹⁶

The ripple effects of de-industrialization in thousands of small towns are apparent in the hollowing out of town centers. From the latter part of the nineteenth century until the 1970s, social, cultural and economic life from small towns to medium-size cities was anchored by their downtowns. And downtowns were anchored by what were called “two part” commercial buildings: two- to four-story brick and masonry buildings with leased retail spaces on the ground floor and offices on the floor or floors above. With the development of the elevator and new building technologies at the beginning of the twentieth century, new downtown “skyscrapers” (five to twelve stories) were erected. Commercial buildings shared space on Main Street with purpose-built structures: town halls, court buildings, libraries, hotels, and movie theaters. Trams, streetcars, and buses brought town residents to “town” to work, shop, bank, and play every day. The advent of the department store led to the construction of multi-story dedicated structures, which became the hub of downtown commerce.¹⁷

Photographs from the 1950s show the persistence of the early twentieth-century streetscape in thousands of towns and cities around the country. They also show busy sidewalks. The rise of the suburban shopping mall in 1960s and 1970s lured department stores, movie theaters, and other retail businesses away from downtowns; the effects were devastating for many. Photographs of contemporary downtown streetscapes show boarded-up storefronts and empty sidewalks.¹⁸ Many of the buildings in which these now shuttered shops once flourished

¹³ Stone, *UnDoing Buildings*, 40.

¹⁴ “Trump: Since China Joined WTO, U.S. Has Lost 60,000 Factories | PolitiFact.” Accessed September 19, 2019. <https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2017/mar/24/donald-trump/trump-china-joined-wto-us-has-lost-60000-factories/>.

¹⁵ Jonathan Merritt, “America’s Epidemic of Empty Churches.” *The Atlantic*, November 25, 2018. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/11/what-should-america-do-its-empty-church-buildings/576592/>.

¹⁶ “The NCES Fast Facts Tool Provides Quick Answers to Many Education Questions (National Center for Education Statistics).” Accessed September 19, 2019. <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=619>.

¹⁷ A Wikipedia page keeps track of “defunct” department stores in the US: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_defunct_department_stores_of_the_United_States

¹⁸ Lizabeth Cohen, “Buying into Downtown Revival: The Centrality of Retail to Postwar Urban Renewal in American Cities,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 611 (May 2007), 82-95.

are those erected a century or more ago. To the adaptive reuse developer they might well represent opportunities for repurposing and, in the process, for reinvigorating the social and cultural heart of the community.

Adaptive Reuse as a Catalyst for Community History and Archival Practice: the Role of the Community Histories Workshop

Established in 2016, the [Community Histories Workshop](#) (CHW) works with local communities to recover, preserve, and share the memories, stories, and materials that reflect the multi-layered histories of place. By helping to connect past to present we believe that communities can envision more just, inclusive, and democratic futures. Our focus has been to work with a wide range of stakeholders to facilitate long-term community history and archiving initiatives precipitated by the adaptive reuse of iconic structures.

Our approach to this work is an expression of our [principles](#). Our goals are to:

- seek out opportunities to transform adaptive repurposing of iconic sites into catalysts for community history and archiving
- bring together a coalition of diverse constituencies as partners in a common civic enterprise
- revitalize the power of historic places to attract and engage multiple publics for many purposes
- create safe spaces for the sharing of manifold experiences and contested memories
- give voice to silences and hopes
- recover exclusions and oppression
- facilitate community conversations that encourage healing, common purpose, and collective action

The work of the CHW is deeply collaborative. Within the workshop, faculty, undergraduate students, graduate students, and staff work and learn together. Within the university we are trans-disciplinary and welcoming of partnerships with other units. Within the state and nation, we work with other universities, government agencies, preservation organizations, foundations, and nonprofits. Within our communities, we partner with adaptive reuse developers, cultural heritage organizations, municipalities, community groups, and volunteers. Through these interventions, we work for a better, more just, democratic, and inclusive future. Such redevelopment projects are the locus of change, bridging the past with the future. They are opportunities for communities to be involved in how a place—their place—transforms.

Our work is important because it:

- advances the institutional mission and priorities of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
- creates and tests new models for community engagement by public universities
- demonstrates the transformative possibilities of the use of digital technologies in public history and public humanities
- builds skills and capacity among local cultural heritage organizations and community groups
- realizes synergies among research, archiving, pedagogy, undergraduate learning, and graduate training
- helps to make the communities we serve better places to live, work, and play

From Digital Innovation Lab to Community Histories Workshop

In many ways the history of the Loray Mill is emblematic of the critical role of textile manufacturing in the history of the American South. It also has been an iconic structure for generations of local residents. The largest mill ever built in the state, it drew tens of thousands of farming families from as far away as Tennessee to work in the mill and live in its mill village. In 1929, the mill was the site of a violent labor struggle, which left a policeman and a strike leader dead and the community bitterly divided. But the mill and mill village were also the center of economic, social, and cultural life for generations of working families.

The mill's closure in 1993, symptomatic of the collapse of the U.S. textile industry in the 1980s and 1990s, also signaled the end of a way of life and source of community identity. Some powerful interests in the town called for the mill to be demolished to remove the site of the city's most traumatic event. Others, led by Preservation North Carolina, mobilized to save the mill. PNC arranged to purchase the mill from the company that had owned it since 1935: Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. A development team, led by Billy Hughes, bought the building in the early 2000s and began putting together the funding package necessary to undertake the repurposing of the mill as a mixed use site. By 2008 the team were close to a deal, but the economic downturn put the project on hold. Hughes and his investors were able to pull together the financing package once again in 2013, and in the summer of that year work began to restore, rehabilitate, and repurpose the structure. When the 430,000 square foot Loray Mill reopened in 2015, it was the largest adaptive reuse project under one roof ever undertaken in North Carolina.

In the summer of 2013, Robert Allen, UNC American Studies professor and then director of the university's [Digital Innovation Lab](#) (DIL) was asked by [Preservation NC](#) to join an informal advisory group to help plan a "history gallery" of photographs and artifacts in the renovated mill, which had been funded by local UNC alumnus Rick Kessell, whose father and

grandfather worked in the mill.¹⁹ Allen grew up near the mill; his grandparents, aunts, and uncles worked in the mill at various points in their lives; and his parents were married at the Loray Baptist Church in the mill village.

Robert Allen persuaded the advisory group, the developer, and Preservation NC, that (1) this was an opportunity to identify, curate, preserve and share as much of the surviving archival material relating to the history of the mill and the mill community as possible, (2) that the effective use of digital technology was key to this process, and (3) that the DIL was singularly positioned to lead this effort. This led to Preservation NC's gift in in 2014 in support of the development of "[Digital Loray](#)": a multi-faceted initiative to create an online archival portal to all available material on the history of the mill and mill village, pilot exhibits and public programming around archival material, identify opportunities for the contribution of locally held materials by community members, and lead the planning process for a dynamic, digitally-enabled history center.

Anchoring what became the most ambitious public humanities initiative ever undertaken by UNC was public historian Julie Davis, who became a postdoctoral fellow in the DIL in October 2014. In February 2015, she moved to Gastonia to become UNC's Public Historian in Residence and one of the renovated mill's first tenants. Over the next fifteen months, she mobilized exhibit designers, property developer, Preservation North Carolina, DIL staff, and local cultural heritage organizations and volunteers in the planning for the [Alfred C. Kessell History Center](#), which opened in October 2016. She also developed the American Studies Department's first graduate seminar in public history; organized three "history open house" events at the mill, which attracted more than 1,000 visitors; and consulted with the [Gaston County Museum of Art and History](#) in the processing of donated artifacts for display in the history center.

Digital Loray became a testing ground for the application of digital humanities tools and approaches to community history and archiving spurred by adaptive reuse. Projects embedded in Digital Loray included:

- [a portal to Digital Loray](#) (led by American Studies PHD candidate Elijah Gaddis), allowing users to access more than 2500 digital items drawn from UNC's special collections, other university and museum archives, and private collections
- [Loray Mill Village in 1920](#) (led by American Studies undergraduate Karen Sieber) online, touch-screen optimized digital mapping exhibit, displaying 1920 census enumeration data over georeferenced 1922 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of the Loray Mill Village

¹⁹ Allen co-founded and directed the Digital Innovation Lab (DIL) from 2011-2016. The DIL's work was supported by and contributed to by the Carolina Digital Humanities Initiative (CDHI), a \$5 million, five-year campus-wide digital humanities initiative catalyzed by a \$1.4 million grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. Allen served as faculty lead and Co-PI from its establishment in 2012 until January 2015.

- [Loray/Firestone Timeline](#) (designed by American Studies PHD candidate Elijah Gaddis) online, touch-screen optimized timeline exhibit, using newspaper articles drawn from the UNC North Carolina Collection's digital collection of pre-1923 newspapers (3.7 million pages)
- Digitization and online publication (through NC Digital Heritage Center) of the plant newspaper, [The Firestone News](#) (1952-93)
- Digitization (through Southern Historical Collection and Southern Oral History Collection) of oral histories of Sophie Melville Gershon and Vera Buch Weisbord, two key strike organizers
- Field-testing and refinement of the DIL-developed digital humanities tool, [Prospect](#), for public history, public humanities, and community archiving uses
- Planning and design of the [Alfred C. Kessell History Center](#) (led by postdoctoral fellow Julie Davis), opened in October 2016
- Organization of/participation in three public humanities events at the mill (led by postdoctoral fellow, Julie Davis), attracting more than 1000 visitors
- Development of cooperative community archiving procedures and workflow with [NC Digital Heritage Center](#) facilitating digital "donation" of individual collections through local cultural heritage organizations
- Digitization (through Duke Univ. Libraries) of "[Gastonia, 1942](#)" by renowned traveling filmmaker H. Lee Waters, and first public screening since 1942
- Digitization (through [National Museum of American History](#)) of original architectural plans of the Loray Mill by Lockwood Greene, Engineers, and installation of enlarged front elevation of the mill (22' x 7') in history center vestibule
- Development (by postdoctoral fellow Julie Davis) of procedures and workflow for donation of mill artifacts by individuals to [Gaston County Museum of Art and History](#), and drafting of borrowing agreement for display in the history center
- Creation (by DIL General Manager, Will Bosley) of "[Windows Through Time](#)": 20-minute, 400-image historical [photo/film montage](#) projected through windows of history center
- Development of prototype for "[Seeing Ourselves](#)," (Charlotte Fryar, American Studies PHD student), online and touch-screen optimized interface for collecting and displaying identified persons, places, and events in "local" films

The success of the Digital Loray project spurred the creation in 2016 of the [Community Histories Workshop](#) (CHW) as a new unit within the DIL. Led by Robert Allen, American Studies professor Seth Kotch, and then American Studies graduate student Elijah Gaddis, the CHW was designed as a flexible, purpose-driven organizational structure within which collaborative, long-tail, community-engaged, digital public history and humanities projects can

be generated, evaluated, and sustained. The CHW continued the DIL's involvement with the Loray project, consulting with Kessell Center staff and maintaining digital exhibits.

Background on the Rocky Mount Mills Project

The CHW started work on Rocky Mount Mills, North Carolina’s second oldest textile mill, in 2016, funded by a gift from the mill’s developer, Capitol Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The Rocky Mount Mills campus has been redeveloped into a mixed-use space—offices, apartments, restaurants, and a craft brewing incubator. Its mill village was renovated and homes rented out. As she noted at the adaptive reuse charrette organized by the CHW on June 11, 2019, CBC’s development manager Evan Covington-Chavez’s nonprofit background informed her approach to the redevelopment project. In her eyes, the mill’s success should be gauged not merely on economic terms but also by its social impact on the community. As a result, she sought CHW’s expertise to highlight the human elements of the mill site. Learning from CBC’s adaptive reuse of the [American Tobacco Campus](#) in Durham, North Carolina, she and her colleagues at CBC thought it was imperative for the renovated Rocky Mount Mills to keep alive the stories of the people who worked at the mill and lived in its mill village—as well as those in the African American community who were excluded from both. From the beginning of her work on the project, she envisioned Rocky Mount Mills as having a welcoming atmosphere that appealed to a diverse and inclusive clientele, and the larger mill campus that incorporated history, the arts, food and beverage, and outdoor recreation.

In the fall of 2016, Covington-Chavez asked CHW’s co-founders Robert Allen and Elijah Gaddis to participate in an event recognizing families in the Rocky Mount area whose members had worked at the mill prior to its closing in 1996. They proposed setting up oral history interview stations around the mill campus (the mill building itself did not reopen until 2018).

In preparation for the “closing story” interviews, they consulted John Mebane, the last president of the mill, who oversaw its closure in 1996. From him they learned that for most of its 200-year history, the mill’s workforce was overwhelmingly white—the only African Americans employed were male workers on the loading dock. However, workplace demographics changed dramatically in the 1960s as a result of the passage of the Civil Rights Act. By the 1980s, African Americans represented nearly 80% of the total workforce. This information prompted a revision of plans to recruit subjects for oral history interviews, in order to reflect the African American experience as workers at the mill, particularly during the first decade of racial integration. Over the next nine months, CHW staff, research fellows, and students in Professor Robert Allen’s classes collected, transcribed, and curated 23 short-form oral history interviews, contributed by former Rocky Mount Mills employees and their families.

Later that year, the CHW piloted a “history harvest” in cooperation with the local public library (Braswell Memorial Library). Community members were invited to bring family memorabilia—photographs, letters, and even home movies—to the library’s event space. There CHW research fellows hosted scanning stations where this material was digitized. The original material was returned to the families along with a digital copy. Families were also asked to allow

their memorabilia to be added to a digital archive, with the assistance of the [North Carolina Digital Heritage Center](#).

Rocky Mount Mills: From Adaptive Reuse to Public Engagement²⁰

Within a few months of the CHW's establishment in the summer of 2016, the CHW received news of a grant program of the National Historical Publications and Records Commission that not only aligned well with the workshop's goals, but would provide the CHW with an opportunity to build on previous work with the Loray project.

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) of the National Archives "supports projects that promote access to America's historical records to encourage understanding of our democracy, history, and culture." The "[Public Engagement with Historical Records](#)" grant program "seeks projects that encourage public engagement with historical records, including the development of new tools that enable people to engage online."

The call for proposals gave examples of the types of programming and activities that might be funded through these grants:

- Enlist volunteer "citizen archivists" in projects to accelerate access to historical records, especially those online. This may include, but is not limited to, efforts to identify, tag, transcribe, annotate, or otherwise enhance digitized historical records.
- Develop educational programs for K-12 students, undergraduate classes, or community members that encourage them to engage with historical records already in repositories or that are collected as part of the project.
- Collect primary source material from people through public gatherings and sponsor discussions or websites about the results.
- Use historical records in artistic endeavors. This could include K-12 students, undergraduate classes, or community members. Examples include projects that encourage researching and writing life stories for performance; using record facsimiles in painting, sculpture, or audiovisual collages; or using text as lyrics for music or as music.
- Develop technologies that encourage the sharing of information about historical records.

The CHW quickly concluded that this NHPRC grant program represented a singular opportunity to further develop work at the intersection of adaptive reuse, community history, and archival practice, and to apply previous experience gleaned from the Loray project to other iconic sites. Furthermore, this emerging connection with the Rocky Mount Mills project came at

²⁰ "Rocky Mount Mills: From Adaptive Reuse to Public Engagement" is a project funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission of the National Archives and Data Administration (Project #DP100110.)

a particularly propitious time. Research performed by the CHW revealed that a project in Rocky Mount Mills would provide a singular opportunity to recover the history of one of the last surviving early nineteenth-century textile mills—a history that had deep connections with UNC-Chapel Hill: the papers of the Battle Family, which owned and operated Rocky Mount Mills over most of its 200-year history, were held by UNC’s Southern Historical Collection, along with the papers of the mill itself. This was also an opportunity to continue working with one of the most visionary adaptive reuse developers in the region (Capitol Broadcasting) and to help change the way an economically disadvantaged community (Rocky Mount) understood not only their history and future, but the way archives, scholars, developers, and cultural heritage organizations collaborate.

Historical Contexts²¹

To understand the significance of this opportunity, it is necessary to place it in the larger context of the history of textiles in North Carolina. As noted above, the economic, social, and cultural landscape of the southeastern Piedmont was transformed between 1885 and 1920 by what a contemporaneous commentator called the “Cotton Mill Campaign.” From Virginia to Alabama, thousands of textile mills and villages to house the families who worked in them seemed to sprout from the red clay. Nowhere was this transformation more pronounced than in North Carolina, where the number of mills increased five-fold. By the beginning of World War I, more than fifty thousand white men, women, and children (some younger than twelve) worked in mills. An even larger number of North Carolinians—white, black, and Native American—were connected to the mills in some way: growing, processing, selling, or transporting cotton; cooking in boarding houses and lunchrooms; caring for children; preaching in the mill churches; and teaching in the mill schools.

The cotton mill boom was itself built on the modest success of pioneering industrialists who harnessed shoals and falls in the state’s inland river valleys—such as the Tar River in eastern North Carolina—to power small cotton gins and mills and leased slave labor from surrounding farms to operate them. Whether these settler-entrepreneurs knew it or not, the falls they appropriated had been important features in the indigenous landscape for thousands of years.

The deployment of slaves and free persons of color as mill operatives came to an end after the Civil War. The business model of the late nineteenth century textile industry in the South depended upon a great regional migration of tens of thousands of white farming families, pushed off the land by ruinous tenant and sharecropping practices and lured into “public work” in the burgeoning small towns of the Piedmont by the prospect of housing, steady work for multiple family members, and the amenities of village life. As steam and electricity replaced

²¹ Portions of this section of the white paper are revised from the project narrative of our NHPRC grant proposal.

water power, cotton mills and villages were sited along the expanding rail networks that connected raw cotton to manufacturing to markets for yarn, sheeting, and woven goods. Although African Americans would continue to be connected to the textile economy, by 1898 when African American entrepreneur Warren Coleman established the first black-owned and operated mill in North Carolina, the New York Times reported that there were no black “operatives” in any of the state’s two hundred mills.

As historian Jacquelyn Hall and her colleagues demonstrated in their path-breaking book, *Like a Family*, a distinctive culture grew out of cotton mill work and mill village communities in North Carolina, affecting every aspect of everyday life: religion, music, education, sports and leisure, foodways, health, gender roles, and race relations. As they argue, cotton mills were sites of long, hard, and dirty work. They were also sites of struggle over working conditions and low pay that sometimes erupted into violence. But cotton mill life engendered distinctive social relations and identities that spanned multiple generations across the twentieth century. Conditions were different in Roanoke Rapids and Ranlo, Saxapahaw and Shelby, but there were strands of shared experience involved in life on the mill village wherever it was.

African Americans, however, were excluded from most jobs in textile production for most of the twentieth century, and, concomitantly, from mill village communities. African American men worked on the loading docks in some plants; African American women were restricted to cleaning jobs and food service. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, the passage of the Civil Rights Act and other victories in the struggle to break down Jim Crow barriers to equal employment resulted in a change in the textile workforce in the South of historic proportions. In 1960, textiles were still the South’s largest industry, but only 3.3% of textile workers were black. By the end of the 1970s, African Americans held more than a quarter of all production jobs. Historian Gavin Wright has called the dramatic influx of black workers, both male and female, in the 1960s and 1970s “a genuine revolution, very deserving of a prominent place in the history of the civil rights movement.”

A century after the “Cotton Mill Campaign” began and over the same amount of time that it developed, the textile and apparel industry in North Carolina withered. Foreign competition, international trade agreements, changes in import quotas, the admission of China, Vietnam, and other low-wage manufacturing countries to the WTO combined in the 1980s and 1990s to drive hundreds of U.S. textile companies out of business. In North Carolina alone between 1982 and 1985, seventy-six plants closed putting 10,000 textile workers out of a job. The second largest textile producing state in the country, North Carolina lost more textile jobs and closed more plants than any other state. Between 1996 and 2006, fifty-five percent of its apparel plants closed, and its textile workforce dropped from 233,000 to 80,000.

The effects of the collapse of the textile industry in North Carolina cascaded through hundreds of small towns: unemployment soared; municipal tax bases shrank; small businesses that served mill communities failed. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the landscape of Piedmont North Carolina was pockmarked by abandoned textile plants, derelict mill houses,

and boarded-up storefronts. Some plants and houses were demolished, but many stood as mute reminders of a bygone way of life.

Rocky Mount Mills instantiates this pattern—from its creation of a water-powered mill along the falls of the Tar River in 1818, to the operation of the mill by slaves during the Antebellum period, the conversion of the business model of the mill to the employment of multiple white family members, and the creation of a “village” of worker housing around the mill by the 1880s. Although the mill is reported to have made cloth for the use of the Confederate Army (which led to its being burned by Union troops in 1863), for most of its life the mill was a spinning mill: converting raw cotton to thread and twine. At the time of the mill’s closure in 1993, it made twine used to tie bundles of tobacco leaves together. The mill’s modern (20th century) history is an example of social patterns common in mill communities. Under the Battle family, the mill was the center of economic, social, and cultural life for generations of white—and, later, African American—Rocky Mount residents. By the 1920s, the mill operated a community center, park, laundry, school, and movie theater for its white employees, and provided electricity, water, and sewer to the village. Lots were designed to encourage family gardens.

The mill closed in 1996, but its last owner, John Mebane, himself a member of the Battle family, was determined that it not be abandoned or demolished. Capitol Broadcasting Company of Raleigh, NC, purchased the site, including mill buildings and other industrial structures (300,000 square feet), thirty mill houses, the seven-acre island in the Tar River that had once served as a recreation area, and 30 vacant lots in the mill village—a total of nearly sixty acres. CBC committed to developing the site as a mixed-use campus, with loft-style apartments; retail, commercial, dining, and event space; a craft brewing incubator; community garden; “rails to trails” greenway; and riverside walk. Houses in the mill village were to be restored for rental.²²

Adaptive Reuse As Catalyst for Community History

Several priorities and singular opportunities emerged from the development of the NHPRC proposal. The CHW has been eager to take on projects that demonstrated how multiple publics might engage in new ways with different types of historical records, and, in doing so expand the very concept of “the archive” as applied to community history. The proposal also created an opportunity to extend the use of digital humanities tools and platforms to address the particular needs of collaborative community history projects: archival practice within communities, data visualization, crowdsourcing, content management, and online publication.

Working within the context of a major public university, the CHW was seeking to realize collaborations across realms of academic endeavor: scholarly research, public history, public

²² Terms of federal tax credits require that residential properties restored or created through credits-funded projects not be sold for five years.

humanities, archival practice, graduate and professional training, pedagogy, and curriculum development.

The position of the CHW—within the state in the South whose history is most associated with the rise and fall of the textile industry—offered unparalleled opportunities help former textile communities to document and explore their histories. For cultural heritage organizations and community groups, these moments of collective reflection and recovery could be opportunities to add capacity, extend their reach into underserved communities, and gain new skills. Teachers and students at all grade levels could contribute to a dynamic, community-based archive, producing durable resources from which new generations of students could learn. For groups leading architectural rehabilitation and reuse efforts, community history initiatives can help to connect the history of iconic sites to their new purposes and both to the communities that will use them in these new ways.

As humanists at the flagship research university in North Carolina, members of the CHW feel a special responsibility to seek out opportunities to work with communities that are struggling to reimagine themselves as post-mill, post-industrial towns. Though land-grant universities have long connected with local communities across the state through agricultural extension and outreach services, the CHW believes that faculty and graduate students in the humanities and “soft” social sciences need to develop new models to connect resources, expertise, and scholarship with local communities. To do this, new organizational structures—within which such models can be devised, implemented, and evaluated—are frequently needed. Building on the research and teaching experience of its founding members in American Studies (Robert Allen, Elijah Gaddis, and Seth Kotch), the CHW chose to focus on oral history, folklore, public history, public humanities, digital humanities, and family history.

New opportunities for collaboration within the university were also developing—the Southern Historical Collection, at the time led by Director Bryan Giemza, received a major grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation to pilot innovative strategies for [“community driven archiving.”](#) The grant supported a three-year project to “support historically underrepresented history keepers in telling, sharing, and preserving their stories.” The goals of the project were to:

- develop creative tools and research to support community history
- demystify institutional archives and support history keepers at the community and local level to steward their own collections and interpret their own histories
- directly support the work of four targeted community-based projects
- create educational resources like short videos, handouts, and templates, using creative commons licensed archivist/community-vetted materials whenever possible, to help others through the many routes to preserving and sharing community memory

CHW Co-Director Robert Allen worked with Giemza to create a shared graduate research fellow position to coordinate the community-focused work of the two units, in particular the

extension of digital humanities tools and platforms developed in the Digital Innovation Lab to the “tool kit” of basic community archiving activities anticipated for the Mellon grant’s four pilot communities. The first holder of this position, Lucas Kelly (PHD student in history at UNC) reviewed the Rocky Mount Mills Papers (33,000 items), the Battle Family Papers (10,000 items) and the Charles Killebrew Photographic Collection (450,000 items). He identified items of particular historical significance and public interest for immediate or future digitization.

In the course of this work, the CHW found that the digitization of archival collections and online publication of finding-aids across institutions was allowing researchers to trace out multiple connections in which a particular mill was involved. For example, the North Carolina Collection at UNC’s Wilson Library has been engaged for more than a decade in the mass digitization of printed and published material that documents these communities: city directories, maps (including all pre-1923 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps), postcards, photographs, and more than 3.6 million pages of digitized local newspapers.

The Digital Innovation Lab’s three years of experience designing and implementing an ambitious collaborative community history initiative around the Loray Mill in Gastonia, NC served as an important precedent for the CHW’s proposed Rocky Mount Mills project. Participants already had experience creating an online archival collection and developing online and onsite exhibits based upon it, creating and sustaining multi-organizational partnerships, leveraging institutional archival resources for the benefit of a local community, working with both commercial property developers and preservation organizations, facilitating the donation of paper and artefactual materials to cultural heritage organizations, incorporating student research into project exhibits, and organizing onsite programmatic events and activities for public audiences.

Of course, one of the greatest archival challenges represented by community history projects centered on mill communities is recovering the lives of the millions of “ordinary” people who worked in the mills and whose families lived in the mill villages. However, the explosion in digitized public records available for genealogical use has revolutionized the ability to conduct community histories at the level of the individual household, map migrations from mountains to mills, and “reconstruct” mill communities at particular points in the past. Thanks to a gift from Ancestry.com in 2014, all UNC Library patrons have access to its more than 16 billion sources, including census enumerations (including slave censuses), immigration and naturalization records, and death certificates.

The “structuring absence” of the histories of all communities in the South, but particularly cotton mill communities, is the very real and continuous presence of African Americans. African Americans were the first Southern mill workers in the antebellum period—both as slaves and as free persons of color. When the Southern textile business model shifted to white family labor after the Civil War, the role of African Americans in mill communities was marginalized, if not expunged, in most historical accounts. Because of this, the members of the CHW strongly felt that the Rocky Mount Mills project should address the urgent

need to recover these roles. The “archive” of the lived experience of cotton mill communities is to be found in the living memories, home movies, mementoes, and stories of those—black or white—who continue to live there. In some cases, these artifacts of memory are the only available link to the working world inside the mills and the culture of mill communities.

In the grant proposal (submitted in October 2016), the CHW organized a plan of work around several interconnected strands and associated collaborative partnerships that follow below.

Teaching the History of Cotton Mill Communities

For a decade, Robert Allen had worked with Christie Norris, Director of [Carolina K-12](#). A unit of Carolina Public Humanities, Carolina K-12 provides curricular and professional development programming for public school teachers in North Carolina. Carolina K-12 offers unique training opportunities and materials for North Carolina’s educators and students. In a single year, Carolina K-12 works with over 750 educators, affecting over 105,000 students. Its publicly available resources have been viewed and downloaded over 200,000 times in a single year by users in each of North Carolina’s 100 counties and every state across the nation. Norris and Allen agreed to the idea of assembling a working group of Nash/Edgecombe-area teachers to create K-12 learning units based on the history of Rocky Mount Mills and its surrounding community.

The Slave History of Rocky Mount

An often neglected part of scholarly research and public history is the kind of fine-grained genealogical research conducted by a wide variety of scholars both amateur and professional. For this project, the CHW turned to colleagues in the Southern Historical Collection—in particular Bernetia Reed, a skilled African American genealogist—to recover the history of enslaved people who worked in mills and the cotton fields that supplied the mills’ raw materials. The goal of this collaboration was to develop a set of resources and research strategies that could be used by local libraries, genealogical societies, community colleges, and K-12 teachers to document family genealogies that reached back to the period of slavery.

Tool and Platform Development: Configuring *Prospect* for Community History

Among a number of digital humanities platforms that had been developed by 2016, the Digital Innovation Lab had launched *Prospect*, a WordPress plug-in for data visualization and content management made available to all faculty, students, and staff at UNC and Duke University. Specifically developed for use within an academic environment, *Prospect* also showed promise as a tool that might be used for community history and archiving as well. The

CHW proposal to NHPRC took advantage of a planned “development cycle” for *Prospect*, as a part of which *Prospect* might be optimized for use in collaborative community history initiatives, including digital mapping (line and point data), timelines, network graphs, collaborative project creation, metadata crowdsourcing, and extended textual document display with embedded references to data records, among other features. As had been done with Digital Loray, the CHW planned to use *Prospect* as a digital asset management and exhibit creation tool for a similar digital archive/portal: Digital Rocky Mount Mills.

Connecting Adaptive Reuse and University Curriculum

With the formation of the CHW, Professor Robert Allen re-designed an American Studies course for advanced undergraduates and graduate students entitled “Documenting Communities” to serve as a flexible curricular vehicle for community-engaged experiential education courses offered by American Studies faculty. Allen’s offerings of “Documenting Communities” (AMST 475) are designed to bridge classroom and community through connecting students at all levels and across multiple disciplines with the work of the CHW and the communities in which it works. In its first offering as a new course “Documenting Communities” brought together students ranging from second-year undergraduates to first-year MA and PHD students as a cooperative learning community. The class visited both the Loray Mill in Gastonia and Rocky Mount Mills and proposed projects that revised, extended, or adapted the work of the CHW and its partners in those communities.

Adaptive Reuse Charrette

With both the Loray Mill and Rocky Mount Mills projects, the CHW has seized upon the repurposing of an iconic industrial structure as a catalyst for a “long-tail” community history and archiving initiative. These projects have both involved partnerships with progressive property developers with a passion for the restoration and re-use of federally recognized historical sites, eagerness to incorporate the history of the site as a part of the user experience, and willingness to collaborate with preservation organizations, cultural heritage organizations, and multiple university units. The CHW has demonstrated its ability to stimulate and lead such adaptive reuse/community history initiatives; bring university expertise to bear upon these projects; mobilize and add capacity to local cultural heritage organizations and community groups; and facilitate the participation of individuals and groups whose voices have typically not been heard in cultural heritage programming.

As a part of its work under the NHPRC grant, the CHW proposed sponsoring an adaptive reuse charrette—a gathering of the diverse stakeholders in adaptive reuse development and community history and archiving. Among those to be invited included adaptive reuse developers,

architects with experience in adaptive reuse projects, historical preservationists, investors in adaptive reuse projects, archivists, and representatives of cultural heritage organizations.

Project Accomplishments

The Rocky Mount Mills project was one of three selected for funding in its grant category. An award letter was issued on October 12, 2017, and the grant period ran through September, 2019. In addition to this white paper on adaptive reuse and community history, the project resulted in the following accomplishments:

- **Creating Digital Rocky Mount Mills**

The digital “home” for the project, Digital Rocky Mount Mills, is an interactive, user-friendly platform that allows researchers, students, teachers, and the wider public to learn about the history of the mill and access and multiple resources. It hosts:

- [Digital Rocky Mount Mills Archive](#)
This repository of images reflecting the history of the mill and the wider community is gathered from a variety of sources, among them: Battle Family Papers and Rocky Mount Mills Collections in the UNC Southern Historical Collection; and materials contributed by community members at our “history harvest” event.
- [Resource-Based History of Rocky Mount](#)
Early in our research, we discovered that there wasn’t a compact, well-researched, accessible narrative history of Rocky Mount Mills and the surrounding community. Project manager Nicole Coscolluela researched and wrote a seven-part narrative history and published it to the Digital Rocky Mount Mills website. Chapters include: Landscape and Environment, Native American Connections, Early Mill History, The Civil War, Reconstruction-Era Political Turmoil, the Great Depression, and the Integration of the Mill in the 1960s.
- [Oral Histories](#)
Over the course of our work in Rocky Mount we sought out opportunities to conduct oral history interviews with members of the community with deep associations with Rocky Mount Mills. We were particularly eager to recover the memories of African American community members in order to record their reflections on the integration of the mill in the 1960s and the subsequent incorporation of African Americans in the mill workforce. Digital Rocky Mount Mills hosts twenty digitally recorded, transcribed, and edited interviews, ranging in length from 20 minutes to 90 minutes. Together, the interviews chronicle life in the mill village, multiple perspectives on working conditions in the mill, leisure and family life, the struggle for civil rights in Eastern North Carolina, the transition from farm life to industrial life for hundreds of

African American families, and the decline of the textile industry and closure of Rocky Mount Mills in 1996.

- [Closing Stories Video](#)

Then an undergraduate research fellow in the CHW, UNC student Morgan Vickers wrote, produced, and edited a brief video that provides a documentary history of the textile industry in North Carolina and Rocky Mount Mills in particular. It focuses on the role of African Americans in this history, particularly during the period of integration. It was designed to be an introduction to the individual oral history interviews for K-12 teachers and students.

- [Slave Genealogy Resources](#)

Digital Rocky Mount Mills hosts resources produced as a part of the project's work on slave genealogy in the Rocky Mount era. [Here](#) can be found a link to Southern Historical Collection staff member Bernetiae Reed's extensive research on the history and genealogy of enslaved people owned by the Battle family; a [digital map](#) showing the migration of Battle family slaves in the 1840s and 1850s, as members of the Battle family moved further south and west; a [guide](#) to African American genealogical research; a recorded and transcribed [interview](#) with Bernetiae Reed, conducted by then-CHW undergraduate research fellow, Sierra Dunne; an [illustrated essay](#) by Bernetiae Reed on the life of Dred Wimberly, whose life began as a slave owned by the Battle family but who lived to be elected to the North Carolina General Assembly.

- [K-12 Resources](#)

Digital Rocky Mount Mills hosts the [lesson plans and learning activities](#) developed by participants in the project's teacher workshop. It also includes issues of the Rocky Mount Mills newspaper, the [Riverside Bulletin](#), published during World War II. These were gathered by Renny Taylor, an area teacher who helped to organize the K-12 component of the project.

- [1939 "Home Movie"](#)

In 1939, mill superintendent M.G. Frye made a home movie, shot in 8mm, of various people and places at the mill and mill village. The only copy of the film passed to his grandson, Robert G. Frye, who donated it to the State Archives of North Carolina in 2007.

- [Pinboard Visualization](#)

CHW graduate research fellow Lucas Kelley designed this visualization of sample material from the Digital Rocky Mount Mills archive to explore the pinboard feature of the UNC-developed data visualization platform, [Prospect](#).

- **Offering professional development workshop to eight 8th-grade teachers, who will create eight lesson plans to be uploaded to Digital Rocky Mount Mills.**

The CHW partnered with UNC's Carolina K-12 to design, plan, and execute "History Unfiltered: Exploring the Southern Textile Industry in Rocky Mount, NC," a curriculum development project around the history of Rocky Mount Mills and its community. The centerpiece of this project was a full-day workshop held at Braswell Memorial Library on October 6, 2018 for area teachers from the two counties that encompass Rocky Mount (Nash and Edgecombe).

Several months in advance of the workshop two local educators (Renny Taylor and Elijah Kane) were recruited to serve as lead teachers for the project. They, in turn, helped to identify other potential participants. They also reviewed oral histories, primary sources, materials collected and digitized from the history harvest, and the historical narrative prepared for the project in order to identify resources that might be especially useful for the creation of class learning units aligning with NC curriculum guidelines. As noted above, Renny Taylor used his connections with community members to locate surviving issues of the *Riverside Bulletin*, the mills' World War II-era newspaper. These rare documents of the area's experience of the war were digitized and added to the Digital Rocky Mount Mills website.

The workshop began with remarks by Carolina K-12 Director Christie Norris and Project Coordinator Nicole Coscolluela. Two consulting scholars, David Zonderman of North Carolina State University and Elijah Gaddis of Auburn University, provided a historical context for mill and its community.

Christie Norris, Renny Taylor, and Elijah Kane introduced the resources with which the teachers would be working. Participants were challenged to come up with activities through which students could come to a better understanding of local history. The workshop ended with a performance by renowned gospel singer Mary D. Williams. In post-event evaluations, 13 participants scored the workshop an "A," and two with "B" ratings (the latter from teachers who wished the event were longer).

The project resulted in 11 lesson plans/activities (hosted on the Digital Rocky Mount Mills website):

- [State of North Carolina v. Negro Will](#)

Will was enslaved by James Battle (1786-1854), owner of Rocky Mount Mills. This was a landmark case (1834) recognizing that slaves had the ability to act in self-defense and that the killing of an overseer or master is manslaughter not murder. Battle supported the defendant Will who had killed his overseer, a white man. The overseer had shot Will in the back and Will defended himself with a knife, killing the overseer in the process. The lesson involves students reading the circumstances of the case and anticipating the verdict, using their knowledge of slavery and slave-master relationships.

- [World War II on the Home Front](#)
Rocky Mount Mills serves as a case study for students trying to learn how World War II impacted the textile industry and everyday home life. They will use excerpts from the Riverside Bulletin to get a localized understanding of rationing, workplace changes, family dynamics, patriotism, and community support.
- [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#)
Students will use first-hand testimonies from CHW’s oral histories and primary source documents to examine the mill’s workplace environment during and after integration.
- [Mill Work and Mill Villages](#)
Students will use oral history interviews to come to a better understanding of what it was like to work a mill such as Rocky Mount Mills and to live in its mill village. They will listen to former mill employees talk about how they came to work at the mill, their daily duties, the people they worked with, and the machines they worked on. Further, they also discuss what it was like growing up and/or living in the mill village – gardening, fishing, playing with the other children, selling products on their porches, etc.
- [Creating a Historical Museum Exhibit](#)
Students will use the narrative history of the mill and community developed as a part of the Digital Rocky Mount Mills project to imagine a “living museum exhibit.”
- [Using Time Stops to Structure Engagement with Oral History Interviews](#)
Oral history interviews have been excerpted by subject to facilitate use by teachers to introduce a wide range of subjects and time periods.
- [Analyzing Runaway Slave Ads](#)
This learning unit uses a database of 2,400 runaway slave advertisements published between 1750 and 1865 compiled by UNC Greensboro and NC A&T University as sources for understanding both the notions of “ownership” upon which slavery was based and the agency of enslaved peoples to resist their condition.
- [Industrialization in the American South](#)
Students will be introduced to the concept of industrialization as it was experienced in the American South through an analysis of primary source material associated with Rocky Mount Mills.
- [Civil Rights Time Capsule](#)
Students research primary sources to identify items they would nominate for inclusion in a “time capsule” reflecting the Civil Rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, especially as manifested in the Rocky Mount area.
- [Minors in the Mill](#)

Using oral histories and other sources, students will learn about child labor in cotton mills in the early part of the 20th century.

- [Railroads and the Mills](#)

Rocky Mount was a major railroad juncture, connecting mills and farms with markets up and down the eastern seaboard. The growth and range of railroad connections are reflected in postcards, maps, photographs, and oral histories.

- **Documenting a workflow and processes for African American genealogy and uploading them to Digital Rocky Mount Mills.**

There is a long and complex slave history in Rocky Mount and the larger coastal plain of North Carolina. Slaves were believed to have built the original mill and mill dam. There are records of slaves operating the mill from 1818-1852. Movement of local planters into newly opened lands in the lower South in the 1850s led to a diaspora of area slaves and the destruction of family units. Of course, slaves and their descendants worked the plantations and farms around Rocky Mount for generation. Many of the slaves directly connected with the history of the mill were likely to have been owned by members of the Battle family, which owned and operated the mill for nearly 200 years.

As a part of this project, the CHW, with the assistance of SHC staff genealogist Bernetae Reed, worked to recover the lives of the Battle family slaves and, in the process, to develop strategies for using primary sources in slave genealogy more generally. One of the stated goals was to identify five individuals who were enslaved by the Battle family and whose genealogy can be traced into the emancipation period. This was a successful initiative, giving names to five otherwise anonymous individuals: Harry Battle, Turner Battle, Rebecca Battle, Raleigh (Riley) Battle, and Mahala Battle. A set of slave genealogy resources growing out of this process is hosted on the Digital Rocky Mount Mills website, supporting the work of local genealogists, historical societies, family historians, and teachers.

Project manager Nicole Coscolluela organized and led a slave genealogy workshop at Rocky Mount Mills on June 11, 2019. Presenters included:

- Beverly Fields Burnette

President of the NC Association of Black Storytellers, Inc., Beverly Burnette is a native of Rocky Mount, NC. Listening to family stories at an early age inspired her life-long interest in family genealogy. Trained as a social worker, she has held positions at a number of schools across North Carolina. Her historical memoirs and poetry have appeared in state and national anthologies. She is active in the African American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAGHS) at the local and national levels. She uses storytelling and poetry as vehicles for teaching about African American genealogy and history.

- Fred Watts

- Active in the African American Historical and Genealogical Society, Fred Watts is also involved in the “The People Not Property Project,” a collaboration among the UNC Greensboro Library, NC Division and Archives and Records, and NC Registers of Deeds to create a database of bills of sales (slave deeds) for enslaved peoples across North Carolina.
- Nadia K. Orton
Attracted to genealogy by research on her paternal family roots dating to 1610, Nadia Orton is a professional genealogist and family historian. She has helped several African American churches in Virginia and North Carolina research the genealogy of their members. She has been an active contributor to the online cemetery inventory site “Find a Grave,” having identified over 10,000 grave markers and memorial for cemeteries across the Southeastern US. She also maintains a blog, “Sacred Ground, Sacred History,” and is a member of several genealogical societies, including the Phoenix Historical Society of Edgecombe County, NC.
 - Jason Tomberlin
Head of research and instructional services for UNC Chapel Hill’s Wilson Special Collections Library, Jason Tomberlin has worked with countless families eager to locate records of loved ones in Wilson Library’s North Carolina Collection and Southern Historical Collection. Before coming to UNC, he was an archivist at the State Archives of North Carolina.

- **Adaptive Reuse Charrette**

On Tuesday, June 11, more than 20 invited adaptive reuse stakeholders from across North Carolina gathered in person in the newly renovated Rocky Mount Mills and virtually via video conference for a conversation on the relationship between adaptive reuse projects and community history and archival practice. The participants included representatives of major adaptive reuse developers, adaptive reuse architecture firms, government agencies, North Carolina’s principal historic preservation organization, non-profit investors, local history and art museums, local history librarians, cultural heritage organizations, and community members. They were joined by representatives of key units of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Together they addressed the broad question “How might the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of iconic historic sites catalyze community history and archiving initiatives?” Discussion was moderated by Robert Allen, James Logan Godfrey Distinguished Professor of American Studies and Co-Director of the UNC Community Histories Workshop. A video recording of the charrette is available. Initial takeaways from the charrette are discussed below.

Among the participants were:

Sarah Almond, Assistant Director, Community Histories Workshop
Robert Allen, Co-Director, UNC Community Histories Workshop
Melody Bardowell, Envolve Optical, community member
Eddie Belk, Principal, Belk Architects
Jerry Bolas, Former Director, Ackland Art Museum, UNC-Chapel Hill
Nicole Coscolluela, Project Coordinator, CHW Rocky Mount Mills Project
Evan Covington Chavez, Rocky Mount Mills Project Manager, Capitol Broadcasting Co.
Ina Dixon, PHD Candidate, American Studies, UNC-CH
Elijah Gaddis, Co-Director, CHW; Assistant Professor, Dept. of History, Auburn University
Maggie Gregg, Regional Director, Preservation North Carolina
Emma Haney, Revolution Mills Project Manager, Self-Help, Inc.
George Jones, Senior Conservation Manager, Triangle Land Conservancy
Jack Kiser, Loray Mill Village Project Manager, Preservation North Carolina
Jason Luker, Director, Gaston County Museum of Art and History
Todd Owen, Assistant Director, UNC Center for Urban and Regional Studies
Marcia Perritt, Associate Director, UNC Development Finance Initiative
Chaitra Powell, Project Manager, Community Driven Archives Project, UNC Southern
Historical Collection
Bernetiae Reed, Staff Member, Community Driven Archives Project, UNC Southern
Historical Collection
Rob Shapard, Lecturer, Dept. of History, UNC-Chapel Hill; Project Manager Walnut Hill
History Project
Deja Smith, Community Engagement Associate, Triangle Land Conservancy
Traci Thompson, Local History and Genealogy Librarian, Braswell Memorial Library,
Rocky Mount, NC
Jason Tomberlin, Head, Research and Instructional Services, UNC Wilson Library Special
Collections

- **Adapting Digital Humanities Technology for Community History and Archives**

[*Prospect*](#) is a flexible, multi-feature, open-source content management and data visualization tool created by the UNC Digital Innovation Lab (DIL). It is designed to be a plug-in for WordPress, and is currently available for use as a part of any UNC WordPress domain website. Since 2015, over 100 digital humanities projects have been mounted using *Prospect* by organizations across the country. Over the term of our NHPRC project, the CHW has consulted with the DIL in a *Prospect* development cycle aimed in part at enhancing *Prospect* features and functionality for use in community history and archival projects. This included improving its ability to handle multi-participant content ingestion (history harvests), curation, and metadata creation. Another goal was to simplify and enhance its overall user experience, facilitating its use on touch-screen devices.

Although the development cycle is still active, the *Prospect* development teams has added several useful features, including accordion windows for menus and a “hint” function when opening the exhibit for the first time. In terms of back-end coding, *Prospect* has a new spreadsheet format for records to make the aggregate easier to view and compare in case of changes and additions. *Prospect* was field tested for features and functionality in a number of projects, including a [pinboard visualization](#) for Digital Rocky Mount Mills. *Prospect* also served as the digital asset management system for scans collected during the Rocky Mount History Harvest.

In 2017, the UNC Southern Historical Collection was awarded a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for a three-year initiative entitled “Building A Model For All Users: Transforming Archive Collections Through Community-Driven Archives.” The goal of Community-Driven Archives Team (CDAT) is to support “historically underrepresented history keepers in telling, sharing, and preserving their stories.” Four community archiving projects were selected as pilots for the project: The Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance, The Eastern Kentucky African American Migration Project, The San Antonio African Community Archives and Museum, and the Appalachian Student Health Coalition. These groups share a goal to “preserve and share under-documented stories and empower communities in the curation of their own histories.” CDAT staff work with community leaders to collect and preserve historical documents and voices, conduct oral history initiatives, produce educational resources, and create digital exhibits.

One of the signature tools developed as part of the Community Driven Archives initiative is what the team is calling the “Archivist in a Backpack.” This is both a conceptual and literal toolkit. Conceptually, it is an array of guides, resources, and links supporting basic community history and archival practice. It is also being offered to some partners as a literal backpack, containing the basic equipment and technology local organizations and community volunteers might use in collecting community history, oral history, and archival projects.

Over the first two years of the CDAT project, the team has shared a graduate research fellowship with the CHW, facilitating cooperation between the two units. This position also allowed for consultations with the *Prospect* development team. Training sessions on devising and mounting digital humanities projects using *Prospect* have been held, and the code for the newest versions “added” to the backpack (*Prospect* is open-source and may be downloaded and updated from GitHub or installed from the WordPress repository). To date, the CDAT has explored the use of *Prospect* in one of its pilot projects, [The San Antonio African American Community Archive and Museum \(SAAACAM\)](#).

We have also worked with a member of the CDAT team, Bernetae Reed, on the slave genealogy components of our Digital Rocky Mount Mills project, including our slave genealogy work process and resource guide (<https://rockymountmill.prospect.unc.edu/african-american-history-and-slave-genealogy/>).

This work is available through our website and thus can also be included in the “tools” for use by CDAT staff and community partners alike.

- **Conference Presentations**

At the National Humanities Conference, organized by the National Humanities Alliance and the Federation of State Humanities Councils, the project was showcased in a dedicated panel, chaired by project coordinator Nicole Coscolluela, entitled “Historians and Developers, Pitfalls and Potential.” Audience members were keen to know more about how community history projects might be catalyzed by adaptive reuse of historic sites, as well as the professional and ethical dimensions of working with property developers.

Additionally, the CHW sought out an opportunity to be featured at the annual meeting of the North Carolina Preservation Consortium on November 16, 2018 at North Carolina State University (Raleigh, NC). The theme of the conference was “Preserving Community Heritage,” a perfect fit for the work. It was a great opportunity to present the project to preservationists, public historians, archivists, museum directors, and community organizations. These meetings, taking place in the fall of 2018, were well-timed, allowing the CHW to incorporate feedback and comments into professional practice going forward.

Takeaways from the Adaptive Reuse Charrette

The experience of the Rocky Mount Mills Project will continue to inform planning and practice as the CHW takes on new projects and challenges. Work at the intersection of adaptive reuse and community history/archiving involves multiple stakeholders, though they seldom gather to discuss roles, interests, and goals. To that end, the June 11, 2019 charrette hosted by the CHW was successful in bringing key players together for a very useful conversation.

Among the organizational stakeholders participating were:²³

- commercial adaptive reuse developers
- adaptive reuse architects
- non-profit adaptive reuse developers
- historic preservationists
- local cultural heritage organizations
- university-sponsored community history and archiving initiatives
- university economic development specialists
- university city and regional planning experts
- academic historians
- archivists
- librarians
- public arts administrators
- public historians
- community members

Takeaways included the following:

- Making commercial adaptive rehabilitation and repurposing of iconic sites a catalyst for community history and an opportunity for university outreach requires a farsighted developer with an appreciation for the multiform values of the site's history and role in the community.
- Stakeholders must be mindful of the long time frame in which adaptive reuse development projects unfold and the uncertainties that are endemic to the process. Rocky Mount Mills redevelopment began in 2015 and was ready for occupancy in 2019.
- Historic preservation organizations, such as Preservation NC, can play a crucial role in preventing the demolition of iconic structures and preventing the further deterioration of abandoned sites. They also can help attract developers (public or private) for rehabilitation and reuse.

²³ Invited but unable to participate was a representative from the [NC State Historical Preservation Office](#).

- Federal and state historic rehabilitation tax credits are often crucial in putting together funding packages for adaptive reuse projects. Thus, state-level offices of historic preservation and the National Park Service are key entities in the process, through nomination of the property for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.
- National Register criteria do more than acknowledge the architectural value of a property, they point to the social, economic, and cultural legacy of the site.²⁴ Thus, they open opportunities for connecting the future of the site with its past and that of its community. National Register nomination research can uncover key events, people, and places associated with a site's history.
- Academic entities such as the Community Histories Workshop can play important roles as instigators of community history initiatives and mobilization of community organizations and groups in support of local history and archiving.
- The most effective academic entities working at this intersection are institutionally "persistent": they have an organizational stability that goes beyond one particular project or academic period (semester or academic year). Such long-term persistence also recognizes the long time frame of adaptive reuse projects.
- The involvement of entities such as the CHW in adaptive reuse provides important opportunities for professional training for undergraduate and graduate students from a wide range of disciplinary orientations: public history, archiving, folklore, oral history, Native American Studies, digital humanities, public humanities.
- Entities such as the CHW that are located within public research universities can create durable interdisciplinary and trans-domain partnerships, linking scholars, archivists, and technologists, which can be mobilized through individual projects. These institutional collaborations help to bring high-level resources and expertise to local communities.
- Successful adaptive reuse/community history initiatives depend upon sustained engagement with cultural heritage organizations in the community: public libraries, museums, historical and genealogical societies. Successful partnerships result in increased capacity and visibility for these organizations.

²⁴ The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or
- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

- Essential to the involvement of academic entities in community history and archival projects is the adoption of a set of core values that inform all partnerships and activities: integrity, trust, diversity, inclusion, and respect for local expertise and experience.
- Individual community members are key resources in any community history/archival project. They are the gatekeepers to the “intangible heritage” of a community and the keepers of public memory. They are unique sources of local knowledge and expertise.
- All adaptive reuse projects across the South involve fraught histories of racial oppression and exclusion. A key goal of community history and archival projects should be a confrontation with this complex history and providing opportunities for the recovery of silenced and marginalized voices.

Adaptive Reuse in the Carolinas, Players and Process: A Conversation

Robert Allen and Sarah Almond Interview adaptive reuse developer Rory Dowling.²⁵

August 27, 2019

Chapel Hill, NC

Four months after the Adaptive Reuse Charette, Robert Allen and CHW Assistant Director Sarah Almond interviewed Rory Dowling, advisor for the Development Finance Initiative (DFI), in order to further clarify adaptive reuse workflows on the development end.

DFI works with local governments in North Carolina to help attract private developers for adaptive reuse projects that frequently feature sites with deep local significance. Dowling has been involved with more than \$250 million of potential development at DFI. Dowling is also the principal and founder of [1st & Main Development](#), a real estate development and consulting firm “focused on enriching communities through downtown revitalization” that has led mixed-use adaptive reuse projects in North Carolina and South Carolina. He has extensive experience working with projects that involve public-private partnerships and a variety of financing solutions, including federal and state historic tax credits, “new market” credits, and brownfield tax incentives, among others.

Currently Dowling is the lead partner for a \$110 million master redevelopment project in downtown Fayetteville, North Carolina, the historical centerpiece of which is the rehabilitation of the 1920s-era Prince Charles Hotel. It also includes an office tower overlooking a new minor-league baseball stadium.

He is also developing the historic Mt. Zion Institute in Winnsboro, S.C., as a new government operations center for Fairfield County. The school’s origins date to 1777. The buildings on the 3+ acre site date to the 1930s. The site also has a military history, serving as encampment sites during the American Revolution and Civil War. An elementary school building on the site burned down, leaving an auditorium, gymnasium, high school building and a teachers’ residence, which were in use through the 1980s. The Town of Winnsboro assumed ownership of the property in 2006 after several unsuccessful attempts to attract a developer. Dowling is working with the Town of Winnsboro and Fairfield County to develop the campus as a new government operations center.

In 2018 he contacted Elijah Gaddis, Assistant Professor of Public History at Auburn University and Co-Director of the Community Histories Workshop, to discuss a community history initiative in conjunction with the adaptive reuse project. This led to Gaddis’s leading a community history and archiving project with the goal of tracing the history of Winnsboro and Mt. Zion through archival research and engaging the community in conversations about their

²⁵ Robert Allen was the Principal Investigator for “Rocky Mount Mills: From Adaptive Reuse to Public Engagement,” A Project Funded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission of the National Archives and Data Administration (Project #DP100110).

memories of the site. This phase of work was also designed to help think about ways the complex history of the town might become part of the redeveloped site.

Dowling received a dual master's degree from UNC-Chapel Hill in business and city & regional planning and holds a bachelor's degree from Washington & Lee University.

NOTE: This conversation has been slightly abridged and edited.

RA [Robert Allen]:

What I'd like to try to do is two things: one is to get a sense of your background and how you got involved in doing adaptive reuse projects, what your motivations and goals were; then to take us through the process that anyone who's going to work in this sphere has to go through. So let's start by just your introducing yourself and giving us a kind of sense of your trajectory to this point in your work.

RD [Rory Dowling]:

I've always had a passion for historic preservation going really back to growing up in Atlanta. They had done some [things] with preservation, but not a whole lot. There were plenty of buildings that had been razed, unfortunately. Experiencing other cities where they had done a great job of preserving their historic assets really brought about my passion.

Then when I went back to school, and started working with DFI, that was when I really saw what the types of projects can do for downtown revitalization. Ultimately, buildings tell a story. The Prince Charles is a good example. I mean, everyone in Fayetteville that grew up there has some sort of tie to the building, whether their parents had their prom there, or they've stayed there, to famous people that have stayed there. What drives it for me is that when you start talking about bringing a building back to life. There's just that sense of energy surrounding a project like that, that doesn't surround your typical ground-up new building. It's typically also why these projects become so popular from a standpoint of people wanting to live there, because they do tell that story. . . .

So I think obviously, the architecture [is] an important attribute, as well seeing these historic buildings preserved and not be torn down, which Prince Charles almost was, as well as the school in Winnsboro. Once you lose that, obviously, you can't rebuild it.

RA:

Is there a community of adaptive reuse developers? Do they have characteristics that are different from I think you called the "ground-up" develop development projects?

RD:

[They tend to be] smaller—more lean and mean, right? Because [adaptive reuse projects] take a lot of time, you can't just churn through them. They're five year projects, right. Your typical development group is going to want to find the quickest way to make money. Your larger development firms need to make money because they're usually backed by big time investors. So they need to find the property that they can close on quick and get shovels in the ground, so that they can put up put a product on the market in eighteen months and get it stabilized to start generating that return needed to their investors. Whereas [adaptive reuse developers] understand that it's going to be three or four years before they really get any income. They're willing to slow down the typical development trajectory. They probably have some more patient capital...Again, these projects take a lot of time. And there's not a lot of people that really like to do them because of the amount of patience you have to have working with the historic preservation aspects of it...We bought Prince Charles right at the end of 2014 and to this day I haven't made a dollar...We'll get ours on the back end hopefully. [It is the same thing with Winnsboro]: we've been in there for two years. We won't make anything until we start the development process and actually doing the construction.

RA:

Do you have any sense of how large the adaptive reuse community of developers is, let's say, in North Carolina?

RD:

I would want to say probably less than 50, but it's probably more than 20. That would be people who are doing this more than once, right? There are a lot in the adaptive reuse community of people that...only do it once. Because you may find out it's a lot harder than you think. [They] have a bad experience and say, "okay, I'm glad I did that. But I'm never doing it again." But I hear a lot of those stories. But I would say pure developers that are doing these types of projects, I would put the number probably in the 25 to 35 range for the state of North Carolina.

RA:

And do you see North Carolina as being a sort of place where a lot of this work is going on?

RD:

In North Carolina there's 20% federal tax credit, and North Carolina has 15% that you can bump up to 20% if it is a tier one community.²⁶ But that still doesn't compare to states like South Carolina where they have a more advantageous tax credit program. In addition to the federal and

²⁶ The tier system of counties, mandated by state law, is a measure of comparative economic distress. Tier 1 and 2 counties—the most distressed—have priority for a number of economic development programs, including state tax credits for adaptive reuse.

state historic tax credits in South Carolina they have what's called an [abandoned building tax credit](#), which provides an additional incentive. And that's the only way that the [Winnsboro] school project is able to work. I would say probably more people doing looking for projects in South Carolina right now, but it's also smaller.

RA:

So do you see adaptive reuse developers chasing tax credits?

RD:

Yes and no. I'll say that we would love to have more projects in South Carolina, because of the abandoned building tax credits. We were asked to look at a project in Georgia [and] Louisiana...[It's] just a bandwidth problem. We're already driving three and a half hours to Winnsboro. So, yeah, I spent a lot of time there. [But] we don't have the manpower to really go to these locations on a regular basis and develop these relationships and put the project together...A lot of these groups are playing in their local environment.

RA:

What I'm hearing from you is that your colleagues in this field tend to be fairly small concerns, in a business sense.

RD:

I think we could probably handle maybe three adaptive reuse projects at a time.

RA:

Are you scheduling those so that they are coming online at different points?

RD:

Yeah, for sure. And then that also plays into the financing side as well. For instance, we're guaranteeing a loan on the Prince Charles and that affects our ability to guarantee further loans down the road on other projects. And so the quicker we can get the Prince Charles stabilized, and take it off our books, then we can go to that same lender and say we've got another project.

RA:

Is there anyone who has attempted to do this kind of adaptive reuse on a large scale?

RD:

The biggest group I know is HRI Properties.²⁷ They've essentially turned what started as just a one-off historic rehab company into a real estate investment trust doing these projects all over the country.

RA:

Let's take a look at the process on a single project level. How did the Winnsboro project come about?

RD:

I had a local connection. This is where a lot of my family was from. [I was tracking] what was happening to [Mt. Zion Institute] and the buildings that had always been of interest to me when I got word that the city, the town, was very close to demolishing it. That's when I first started having conversations with the county. I knew the town...just wanted to get rid of it, but that the county was thinking about building a new county facility but didn't have the funds. And so that's when I initially reached out to them over—two years ago at this point—and started talking to them about their interest in working with us.

At the time, you know, I didn't own the property, the town still had it. So the first, first really critical thing that needs to happen is that you need to have some sort of site control before you really put anything pen to paper and start figuring out how the project is going to work. Once I knew that the county was interested and told me that if I could put together a way that financially feasible for us then we would be interested in moving forward.

That's when I approached the town and said, "Can you give me an option? Can you give me six months, delay the demolition for six months and let me work with the county. And if we can come to you with something that proved it is going to happen, then, you'll pass the building over to me." And they said, "Okay, you've six months." So for that next six months we started really diving into the financial side, and thinking through, how can this project work, identifying how tax credits would flow to the project, how we can generate equity from those. How we could use the abandoned building tax credit. And we're in a sense, we're getting started. We had done projects in North Carolina, but not South Carolina. And we started thinking about the different program elements that the county needs to fit into the space.

We had to bring on an architect just to do some preliminary planning. We had to get structural engineers to look at the bones of the building and an environmental consultant to figure out what

²⁷ [HRI Properties](#) describes itself as "a diversified, national real estate company engaged in the ownership, development and management of upscale-branded and independent hotels, luxury apartments and mixed-use properties in urban centers."

sort of remediation need there would be. We had to get a lawyer on board to start thinking through what a potential agreement would look like with the county. So there were some expenses—probably \$35-40,000 at that point. Our goal was [during that six months period] to come to a preliminary agreement with the county. Then we can then go to the town and say, “Look, the county is on board and we’re on board. Here is the agreement that we have with the county. Now, are you willing to forego demolition and pass the building over?” And that’s what happened, we were able to meet reach that agreement. And then the town said, “Okay, here’s the building,” but they still said, “you know, if things fall apart over the next 12 months, then you have to give the building back, and we’re going to tear it down.”

That was sort of the first step in the process—getting to a comfortable position where the county was able to sign a document saying that we agree in principle on this development plan. Once we had the building we really started putting together some pre-development funds, working with the county to determine what [needed] to happen over the next 12 months to get to a point where we could execute a lease agreement with them for the entire building, and start putting together more of a detailed architectural plan so that we can bring that to the State Historic Preservation folks to get their approval. [We needed to] make sure that we are preserving the characteristic of the building that we needed to in order to get the tax credits. Then [we brought] on a general contractor to start testing some of our development budget assumptions...So then you’re waiting for the historic preservation folks to make their determination. They’ve got 90 days, then they come back to you and say, “We need you to tweak this, we need you to tweak that.” Then you go back to them. [That] resets the clock. So that’s a lot of waiting in these projects and getting the right approvals in place.

RA:

To what extent, in your experience, have municipalities been an interested party in these projects?

RD:

Yes, a lot of times you’re talking about these smaller towns that have these one-off, really iconic buildings in their downtown. They want to see something happen, right? The biggest [issue is] site control.²⁸ Even before a developer or the DFI can come in there needs to be some element of site control, so that you’re not wasting your time and wasting your money...

²⁸ Site Control “means that Seller (a) owns the Site, (b) is the lessee of the Site under a Lease, (c) is the holder of a right-of-way grant or similar instrument with respect to the Site, or (d) is managing partner or other Person authorized to act in all matters relating to the control and Operation of the Site and Generating Facility.” <https://www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/site-control>

RA:

Do municipalities ever take the role of themselves? Owning a property or buying a property from a private party for the purpose of adaptive reuse?

RD:

Yeah, so that's exactly what [the town of Smithfield, NC] just did. They just exercised the purchase option on [the Gabriel Johnson Hotel site]...That was sort of their way of saying, "we've got control, now we need to find a developer." If there's interest on the private side, they will often try to structure an option agreement where the city basically has the right to purchase, but there is a six-twelve month due diligence period before they have to put any money down. We will come in and say we'll do our pre-development analysis in that six to twelve month period. And at the end of that, we'll have a good feel for whether we think we have a project that's financially feasible...

RA:

Is it common for the impending demolition of a historic building or the prospect of its being used in a way that is not in the community's best interests to galvanize the adaptive reuse process?

RD:

Yes, I think so...There was talk about the Prince Charles coming down if nobody bought it at the auction where we bought it. [But] I wouldn't say that's usually a trigger. Often these buildings are already in a historic district so there's usually some protections in place.²⁹ You've also got sort of the [Preservation North Carolina](#) folks who do a good job protecting these structures when they're in danger of being torn down.³⁰

²⁹ A historic district "possesses a significant concentration, linkage, or continuity of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or aesthetically by plan or physical development." The [process](#) through which a historic district is created is handled by the U.S. Department of Interior through the National Park Service.

³⁰ Established in 1939, [Preservation North Carolina](#) is a state-wide non-profit organization whose mission is "to protect and promote buildings, landscapes, and sites important to the diverse heritage of North Carolina." Its Endangered Properties Program is especially relevant to the adaptive reuse process. Through it Preservation NC locates and acquires historic properties under threat of demolition and attempts to find purchasers (including developers) capable of rehabilitating them. Preservation North Carolina was instrumental in preserving the Loray Mill in Gastonia, NC—the largest cotton mill under one roof in the South when it opened in 1901. The mill closed in 1993. PNC purchased the 600,000 square foot structure from Firestone Tire and Rubber Co. to prevent its demolition and maintained it until a developer could be found. The mill reopened in 2015 as a mixed use development. PNC remains involved in the local community through its [program](#) of purchasing, rehabilitating, and selling mill houses. PNC was also instrumental in the involvement of UNC's [Digital Innovation Lab](#) through which a history center was established in the renovated mill.

RA:

Getting a property declared a historic site at the state and federal level is key to securing state and federal tax credits, which, in turn, can be critical to putting together the funding package required for the rehabilitation and repurposing of the site. Can you talk a bit about this process?

RD:

The biggest thing is, is making sure that the State Historic Preservation folks and the National Park Service are comfortable with the development program. They are concerned with exterior components of the building and any interior components that are instrumental to the building's past. If there's a theater or ballroom or something like that, they usually want to see those areas maintained.³¹

³¹ [The North Carolina State Preservation Office](#) administers the state rehabilitation tax credit program, which since 1998 has led to over \$1.36 billion of private investment for more than 2000 adaptive reuse projects in 90 of the state's 100 counties. North Carolina consistently ranks near the top nationally in the number of "certified" (tax credit eligible) rehabilitation projects. A 2008 study estimated that these projects have created more than 23,000 new full-time jobs. The unit's Restoration Services Branch reviews and coordinates applications for both [state and federal preservation tax credit projects](#). Owners and developers of approved adaptive reuse projects in North Carolina are eligible for a 20% federal income tax credit and a 15-20% state tax credit for the rehabilitation of income-producing buildings. An example on the HPO's website shows how combined state and federal programs can result in \$350,000 of tax credits for a \$1 million income-producing adaptive reuse project.

There is a three-step application and review process that in North Carolina begins with the submission of an application for review by the HPO, which also provides technical assistance and advice to owners and developers. The HPO sends the application and its recommendation to the National Park Service (NPS), which administers the National Register of Historic Places. The NPS reviews the application and, upon approval, issues certification. The application and review process involves:

- Part 1: Evaluation of Significance
"Provides documentation that the building contributes to a National Register Historic District or property."
- Part 2 (Federal) and Part A (State): Description of Rehabilitation
"Consists of detailed descriptions of existing conditions and the proposed work, overall before rehabilitation photos, and plans or drawings, as needed, to fully describe the scope of the rehabilitation project."
- Part 3 (Federal) and Part B (State): Request for Certification of Completed Work
"Consists of after photos documenting the rehabilitated property."

The [review criteria](#) for inclusion on the National Register are:

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and:

- A. That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. That are associated with the lives of significant persons in our past; or
- C. That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. That have yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

Approval results in the property being listed in the [National Register of Historic Places](#), which, in turn, makes the project eligible for both state and federal tax credits. The HPO website notes that most

One of the biggest first steps is getting what's called your [Part One](#) approval. And that's basically the HPO and NPS signing off on your architectural plans. The [Part Three](#) approval comes once you finish the building. They come and do their walk-through and...they make sure that you actually did what you said you were going to do.

So we have a historic tax credit consultant out of Charleston who is working with us on in Winnsboro, and they help guide us through the process. They have the relationships in place with the state folks. They write all of the applications for you; they know the right type of language to use. When you get responses from state folks, and they tell you need to make certain modifications, they help you through that process...So it's a pretty detailed process. [These state folks] they love their [historic] preservation—which we all do—but their job, their single job is to preserve the building. So they don't care how hard they make it for you...Unfortunately, they don't care if their decision determines the fate of the building, either. You can you can try to make the argument that the only way this works financially is to do this, but they don't care.

RA:

So let's assume the project has now gotten through the historical preservation process. You're good to go with that. So it's the next is the next phase, activating the tax credits at both the federal and state levels.

RD:

In Winnsboro we are...[applying for part of] an annual allocation provided at the federal level called Community Development entities.³² Only 30% of the community development entities that apply for the allocation received it, so we were dependent on this project receiving an allocation from one of those CDEs. We didn't hear that until May—after they got delayed two months when the government shut down. So we had to wait on that.

applications are handled by private consultants. The review process takes a minimum of six months “and may take much longer.”

³² “A Community Development Entity (CDE) is a domestic corporation or partnership that is an intermediary vehicle for the provision of loans, investments, or financial counseling in low-income communities. Certification as a CDE allows organizations to participate either directly or indirectly in the New Markets Tax Credit Program. A CDE is a domestic corporation or partnership that is an intermediary vehicle for the provision of loans, investments, or financial counseling in Low-Income Communities (LICs). Benefits of being certified as a CDE include being able to apply to the CDFI Fund to receive a New Markets Tax Credit (NMTC) allocation to offer its investors in exchange for equity investments in the CDE and/or its subsidiaries; or to receive loans or investments from other CDEs that have received NMTC allocations. . . . To become certified as a CDE, an organization must submit a CDE Certification Application to the Fund for review. The application must demonstrate that the applicant meets each of the following requirements to become certified: “be a legal entity at the time of application; have a primary mission of serving LICs; and maintain accountability to the residents of its targeted LICs.”

That's a big component of this project. Once we got that allocation I called our tax credit syndicators. [They] actually go out and find the tax credit investors for the project...We don't actually take the tax credits, we get them from being the owner and the developer. This project is going to have five and a half million dollars in tax credits, but I certainly don't have the ability to write that off. So essentially a large corporation—Chase Bank, US Bank, even Sherwin Williams, the paint company, is our investor...

You have to go and find these investors through a third party consultant. And then, once you have all those players at the table: the state tax credits investor, the federal tax credit investor, the new market [CDE] tax credit investor, then you have to get all the legal parties together, which we're just starting to do here. So for Winnsboro, we have nine different lawyers involved. And so you can imagine how long that's going to take to get everybody comfortable with where they are in the capital stack. At the same time we're working with our construction lender to come in and get comfortable with tax credit structure. That's what will be happening over the next 90-120 days until we finally get to closing.

RA:

There's an obvious motivation on the part of the investors because they want tax credits that can offset their tax liabilities, correct? Is there any other motivation?

RD:

We're selling the tax credits for on average about 75 cents on the dollar. So they're essentially making an investment and they're getting a pretty significant discount. They're putting in 70 cents, but they're getting \$1 back in credit.

RA:

Now you've sold your tax credits, you've sat around the table and everyone has signed off on the deal. So when do you start shoveling dirt?

RD:

Our plan for Winnsboro is to close by the end of the year. And then begins the redevelopment process. It will be a 12 month redevelopment...That's a typical rule of thumb for any building that sort of 50,000 to 100,000 square feet from the rehab standpoint: 12 months.

RA:

Leaving Winnsboro aside for the moment, in a typical commercial adaptive reuse is there a point in the redevelopment process that the municipality or the county get involved? I'm thinking property tax, zoning approval, etc?

RD:

Typically not, there wouldn't be much role [at that point] for local government. [Usually that would have been taken care of] on the front end...The developer is going to want to see that...the way that the public is going to participate is already formalized before they go to a lender.

SA [Sarah Almond]:

[So now when] you're looking at the property, and you're figuring out what is going to make a building work or not work—how much needs to be residential, how much needs to be retail. When does something like what we [in the Community Histories Workshop] do enter into that process? Historical due diligence, for example. Does that come after you've kind of divvied up the space and figured out what space needs to be used for what? For what or is it prior to that?

RD:

I think if you're talking about implementing some sort of [initial phase of work] into the program, it needs to come prior to that; you need to come prior to when you're actually programming the building, [when you are] working with the architect.

That's what we did in Winnsboro. We sort of had an idea where we thought some space might work. But I think just from a pure standpoint of telling the story of building or site, I think that should come in on the front end, and particularly when we're talking about the work we're doing at DFI [Development Finance Initiative] it would make sense to have [your] phase one tied to the work we're doing. And again, I think it really would fit well when we go and start talking to private developers and when we start talking to the public about why this project is being done, it's helpful to have that historic context. A lot of people say, "Oh, wow, I didn't realize that. I didn't realize that."

Even with projects like [Loray](#), sometimes people just don't see the need to invest in historic buildings, or think it's a waste of money. But when you can talk not only about the economic impact of what's going to happen with that revitalized project, but also there's that history. Maybe the average person is still not going to know what the history of these buildings are, so to bring that to life, to have that as a component when we go through our public participation, I think this would be something that would be great. So, I think it's something that should really come on the in the beginning.

But at the same time it's an added expense. It's not a huge one, but it is an added expense that the private developer would have to think about. But from a municipality standpoint if they were paying us [DFI] \$50-60,000 for our pre-development services, And to be able to tack on your services...it's still not a whole lot.

RA:

In this initial phase of work that an entity like CHW might do, who would be the audience? And what would they be looking for from us?

RD:

On the DFI side, . . . I think you'd be talking with the architect, talking with the local government, but also talking with the general public. And I think the end product that would be most helpful and probably most well received would be just the raw history of the site in addition to where the additional archival research rests. That's what's going to be used by us and by the municipality to sort of market the opportunity.

From my standpoint with Winnsboro, I was most concerned with, obviously, some of the negativity associated with the site. And, and I knew there was going to be some people who wanted to see that building razed. And so making sure that this wasn't being done for just for people that were able to go to school there, but trying to tell the whole story of education and in Fairfield County. It's also thinking about how your research can make a project like that more interesting. There's also the idea of having that space where the history can be told is interesting. At the end of the day, I think you're going to find the private developers are going to be interested in figuring out how there can be that space incorporated within the development, as opposed to just having a report. Because, you know, it's something that people can see and it creates an additional draw to the project.

RA:

Can you make a value proposition to a municipality or to a developer that our work is going to add long term value to an adaptive reuse project?

RD:

I think so because you're helping the project get to a level of attractiveness for private developer. And I think it can add value to the work we're doing [in the Development Finance Initiative]. It is complementary. From a developer standpoint, I think there's all sorts of ways that the work you all do can get incorporated, creating visuals for a gallery to learn the story [of the building]. Every building is so different. If you're talking about apartments, maybe every resident gets a copy of the report you've done that has been turned into a book. There's a lot of ways I think that your work can get incorporated and become a value proposition. In Winnsboro...we're now talking about the teachers building, becoming a visitor center—Fairfield County's first visitor center. So what better building in which to have an exhibit on the history of education in

Fairfield County? It could become a tourist attraction. So then it becomes another economic generator for the county.³³

SA:

In terms of the way you both put it, you end of quantifying it in the same way you would creative services—like design services, branding services. That’s where we might fall in terms of the different expenses on a project.

RD:

That’s not a bad way to think about it. Every one of these projects has a marketing budget. I don’t mean to put you all in that category. . . .

SA:

I think it is just being realistic. It is like a creative service in that it’s a little bit harder to provide metrics in terms of the return on investment, but what we’re providing is something that then becomes a launching pad for a bunch of other things to happen.

RA:

I wonder if there if there’s a generational value to “history” with regard to adaptive reuse here. We know that many of the folks living in the loft apartments of the rehabilitated Loray Mill in Gastonia are millennials who are working in Charlotte [twenty miles away] but prefer to live in a place where there is a historical connection in every beam and floorboard.

RD:

I think you’re absolutely right. Our research shows that these [adaptive reuse] projects are generating a rent premium of 30% plus...There’s a “coolness factor” that you don’t get from your typical garden style apartment building. There’s something about being able to wake up every day and know you’re living in a historic building: that’s where I live.

RA:

Let’s talk a bit more about what we’re likely to find in a due diligence phase of community histories that are catalyzed by the kind of adaptive reuse projects we’ve all worked on here in North and South Carolina. We know that every building in the South that would qualify for historical status [and hence rehabilitation tax credits] has a contested racial history. This is

³³ The Teachers Building is a residential structure on the grounds of the Mt. Zion Institute originally built to house the female teachers who worked there.

certainly the case in the Winnsboro project.³⁴ Is there a role that we [entities such as the CHW] could play in helping communities come to terms with the complexities of their own histories?

RD:

Yes, and I think that's something that Elijah [Elijah Gaddis] has done a good job with. In Winnsboro there were a lot of people who didn't understand why the county was going to spend money on rehabilitating a building that represented exclusion. So, absolutely it's the ability to bring both sides to the table and speak honestly and share their thoughts.

We had a town hall forum a couple of months ago. There were some heated comments, but at the end of the day I think it was very good. Everyone appreciated the work had been done, and some were curious as to what's going to come out of it, but absolutely.

RA:

Looking at adaptive repurposing of cotton mills from another generational perspective, one of the things we found in the Loray and Rocky Mount Mills projects was that, because of the decline of the textile industry in the 1980s and 1990s, there is a generation of folks now in their 70s, 80s, and 90s, who are the last generation with living experience working in cotton mills and living in mill villages. So there is what some would see as an urgent need to collect and preserve their stories. Do you see adaptive reuse as an opportunity to undertake oral history initiatives?

RD:

Absolutely. [In Winnsboro] Elijah [Gaddis] has interviewed a number of people—I think the oldest is in her 90s—whose stories would not have been captured if this had not been done. There were these fantastic tidbits of what happened at Mt. Zion [Institute]...Its preserving the memories that otherwise would never be told...Thinking about it from a value perspective, it is a way for you to engage the community at a level that we [as developers] would not be able to do. It builds another level of excitement for what's happening with these projects.

SA:

Even if we're not the ones conducting these interviews and performing these tasks, we're identifying stakeholders in the community and working in a very connective capacity.

RA:

Certainly, one of the things we try to do in all of our projects is to identify early on who our cultural heritage partners are going to be. In the case of Winnsboro, of course, you immediately pointed Elijah to the [Fairfield County Museum](#). In Rocky Mount, we've worked for a long time

³⁴ The Mt. Zion Institute shares with many other schools in the South a long history of racial exclusion that did not end until the 1960s and 1970s.

with Traci Thompson and the wonderful work she does as a local librarian and genealogist at the [Braswell Memorial Library](#). In Gastonia, we've seen the connections between the [Gaston County Museum](#) and the mill's [Alfred Kessell History Center](#) grow and develop over some five years now. One of our goals is to use the resources that we have as an entity within a leading public research university to help increase capacity and visibility of local cultural heritage organizations.

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