

**Keeping A Sense of Community: Archiving in the Shiloh Community,
Asheville**

Cheri Fleming
University of North Carolina at Asheville
Health and Wellness Promotion

Faculty Advisor: Ameena Batada
Community Advisor: Norma Baynes

Abstract:

Despite the social barriers, inequality, and economic pressures from the ever-growing population, the Shiloh area of Asheville, NC has maintained its sense of community. One important part of this sense of community involves the meticulous record-keeping of the Shiloh Community Association (SCA). The SCA members, along with the African-American residents of Shiloh, show great commitment: promoting healthy lifestyles, supporting small businesses, recognizing youth education, cultivating diversity, pushing for safe environments, and creating recreational programs, etc.-within their community. With the increasing urban-white population-the inequality and economic gain is on the rise; putting the Shiloh community and its residence at constant risk for displacement. The purpose of this public service project was to assist the SCA in transferring nearly 15 years of archival documents from hard copies to electronic files. The methods undertaken included scanning of documents from many binders, labeling over one thousand files, organizing the files by year and according to type of file, and training SCA members and residents in how to access and navigate the electronic archive. While the product is a shared electronic folder, the results include greater access to community documents, a living history of the community, and a mode for future documentation. This project represents a community's effort to keep a sense of community while showcasing commitment. As the student working on this project, I have appreciated the opportunity to gain insight into this community's history.

Keys Terms: Community, Inequality, Displacement, History, Commitment, Archived Documents

Background/Origins of the Project

The Shiloh community has a history going back to the late 19th century, when they were once located just north of Asheville, NC, then where they are now. Interestingly, the community resided on the property where the Biltmore House currently stands and was moved to the southern area by its owner, George Vanderbilt, where the community still resides today. In the 21st century we know this would be considered as a form of displacement due to acts of gentrification. African American communities around the country have been displaced as the middle to upper class move into them or as economic gain becomes too great.

Interest in promoting community involvement in Shiloh was especially prominent among those in an organization called the Community League of the early 20th century. The Community League wasn't the only important organization at that time, however; the Shiloh Residents Community was a forerunner of what is the present-day Shiloh Community Association (SCA)

(<http://www.shilohnc.org>). This community and their representatives have showcased commitment in promoting growth and development despite the surrounding societal challenges related to race and class.

The Shiloh Community Association (SCA) fosters community involvement. The SCA cultivates: "relationships among the residents, property owners, and businesses; Promotes Harmonious growth and development of the community; health, educational, and residential programs for the children; Offers quality housing development and good citizenship among and by residents of the community" (<https://www.shilohnc.org>). The SCA strives to invest in their African-American community while welcoming diverse backgrounds and keeping a sense of community. A study conducted by Wagmiller et al, points out, welcoming diverse backgrounds and the growth of integration leads to decreased impact of segregation (2017).

The Shiloh Community is a historic community in Asheville and thus it is important to document its history in a meaningful and systematic way. It appeared to the SCA, that an electronic archive would be a valuable way of systematically holding all of its documents. According to the U.S. Census Bureau on economic and statistics, since 2011, the use of internet is continuing to rise (Bureau, 2013). The convenience of networking and accessing knowledge through electronic devices is shaping the demand for them (Poushter, 2016). A thesis based on “archives as the cornerstone of community growth”, points out that community archives have the capacity to become the center of local knowledge. With that knowledge base, a community can participate in its economical state and support wellbeing (Richards, 2010). In reviewing these readings, it is evident that producing an electronic archive for the Shiloh community residents is a great aspect on its development.

The importance of this documentation is not only for the community itself, but as a way for the public to understand the community as well. As such, the SCA electronic archiving project was born. This project is a collaborative process that aims to organize all documents that laid the foundation on which the Shiloh Community Association has been built. Ms. Norma Baynes, who has been the keeper of hundreds of hard copy documents over the past 20 years - has been working with Dr. Batada and previous students in UNC-Asheville’s Health Disparity service learning/engagement class. In the spring and summer of 2017, they scanned hundreds of documents and created an electronic filing system.

Methods and Work Undertaken

When learning of the need for further organization of the electronic archived documents from Dr. Batada, I reached out to Ms. Norma Baynes and had the pleasure to sit at her dining room

table to hear how the documents have been kept in her home for years. As part of the Shiloh Community Association, her insight and experience inspired me to accomplish the product. Dr. Batada provided me with the electronic files that the previous students gathered and scanned, and I continued their work by organizing, renaming, allocating and creating the index from shared document folders, for greater accessibility. With the assistance of Ms. Norma Baynes, my community advisor, Lauralee Petritz- the Shiloh community garden coordinator, and Dr. Batada-who began this project; my work has had full support. We collaborated using through phone and/or in-person meetings, electronic devices and shared access through my portable laptop. A timeline was created for efficiency, for collaboration, and to reach deadlines; as presented below:

February 19th-Review existing files and folders and receive additional files from Dr. Batada.

February 30th- Look at additional files and rename them.

March 15th- Continue to look at additional files and rename them, allocate files to appropriately dated folders, organize files by type (i.e. news article, agendas, flyers, bills, etc.).

March 30th- Review with Ms. Norma to scan and organize any additional files from this year.

April 15th- Create an index of the file types and cross listings and prepare a training session.

April 19th- Conduct a training with SCA executive committee members to teach them about the archives.

Challenges Faced and Responses to Those Challenges

Despite the popularity of shared google documentation; the most challenging aspect of using it in this project was in the beginning stage of moving Shiloh documents to categorized folders for the archive. When moving the SCA documents from a shared to a non-shared folder for organizational purposes, it caused documents to go missing. I had a community's history and

years of SCA documentation; along with the work of previous students through the Health Disparity course, in my hands. There was a moment of absolute concern that I messed up. When collaborating with my faculty advisor about this concern, I was able to retrieve the documents once again and continue with the work.

Timelines are something else that can be challenging, if flexibility for them isn't considered, for example; while working on this project there were times when I had to wait for scanned documents so that I could continue to archive. This would come from more than one collaborator and their availability would not always fit mine. Time management skills were useful in these cases, because it allowed me to push other obligations ahead of schedule to make myself available for when I had new documents ready to archive.

As a recommendation for working with community partners, I found it important that creating relationships build trust. While researching material on relationships between African American and White communities, I found primary research relating to the ideology and perception of cultural community. Ernest McGowen (2013) studied African Americans in predominantly White suburban areas. His conclusion is that suburban African Americans use their community more because their views are consistent with their coethnic views. McGowen's research suggests that cultural similarity is more important than geographic proximity for African Americans living in majority white suburbs. I find this research to be helpful understanding this project. It is good practice to understand the SCA needs before proposing technological, structural, behavioral, political, or social change. A challenge may present itself if I were to implement ideas outside the communities own ideas.

As a student and especially as a white college student, who does not reside in the African American Shiloh Community, I am viewing, labeling, and organizing their work, and that presents a certain challenge. The need to be mindful of what the SCA needed should be honored and therefore creating that space of trust between myself and the SCA was very important for both parties. The way for me to do that was to talk with Ms. Baynes about her involvement, ask her to share her story, build a relationship, and keep the communication ongoing.

I anticipate the possibility of schedule conflicts for training the SCA members on how to use the electronic archive. More than one training may have to be conducted. When training, there is the hope that the individual or individuals will remember the content. That is not always the case and therefore could present a few challenges in meeting the timeline. My suggestion is to introduce a short training manual for the members as well as utilize time management and some flexibility in my own schedule, to make sure everyone can be trained.

Project Outcomes and Sustainability

Through this project, over 500 documents have been scanned, labeled, and organized so that future records can be added. Each document was named and placed in labeled files; where I then separated into their own distinctive folder. In doing this, over time it showed a pattern in categorization. This will offer a smooth process for future archivists, who can pick up the work when I am done. The project will continue, but the archive presently offers easily accessible and well-organized resources for its community, the SCA and their partners, and the social public.

Through each meaningful interaction as opportunities arise beyond the finished product I can continue being present at SCA meetings, which are held within Ms. Norma's home and volunteer my services at the Shiloh community garden. In finalizing the project, training will be provided to teach the SCA executive committee members about the electronic archive and how to use it. It consists of folders organized by years, months and category. Each category has unlimited number of documents named. This system will make it easier for SCA to go in and find what they may need, for example; meeting minutes from 2005 can show documented evidence of how things were handled in the past. A folder containing flyers or materials that SCA has used previously can be pulled and reproduced, without starting from scratch. They will have easier access to previous actions.

This will add sustainable outcomes for the archive and the collaboration with SCA's partners. There is potential for improvements beyond the SCA. A study conducted by Cyril et al found that community engagement had positively impacted health behaviors, public health planning, health literacy, health outcomes that included collaborative partnerships and power-sharing, and health service access; by 87% out of 24 studies (2015). All these positive effects sound wonderful in my mind and as a community engaged student, I hope for better outcomes. When it comes to academics, it is good practice to look at more than one variable that plays a role in outcomes. The other aspect in producing the archive is the awareness that may happen when viewing documentation of the SCA's commitment to their community. A study by Gloria Billingsley, looked at black community involvement as a way of overcoming barriers. Results showed that a call to action was identified as the most likely reason for a community to become involved. Identifying needs, problems, events, processes, and solutions can bring genuine black community involvement (Billingsley, 133). This archive presents a sustainable call to action. The electronic documents that students before me and myself have archived, presents opportunity for future classes in HWP and engaged scholars to do the same. Involvement doesn't have to be just from students; interns, youth from the community, and volunteers can assist in updating the archive.

Ties to Academia

As a Health and Wellness Promotion major, I am especially interested in public health and the disparities that exist within regions. The aspect on success in a community's involvement while keeping a "sense of community" through social and economic change is a fundamental piece to understanding the well-being within it. This project is essential in understanding an African-American community perspective. I have drawn upon the collective product to identify disparities that exist between the Shiloh communities increasing diversity and the surrounding urban population that may affect it, such as, racial indifference, economic gain or inequality, and social barriers. All of these, which can be the basis of stress among the African Americans leading to health inequalities (Kennedy, 2013). I was able to understand and identify certain areas of increased efforts to keep an African American community sustainable; through the education of my Health Parity: Domestic and Global Contexts course, such as;

1. SCA community garden;
2. Healthy Living and Behavior Awareness Events;
3. Education;
4. Access to better living conditions;
5. Environmental and safety concerns;

The Shiloh Community Association and Shiloh residents are unique in a sense that despite the growth in diversity and development they have kept a sense of community. As listed above, the community garden is one example that has been a way to overcome barriers, for example; the lack of access to healthier food items. A study looked at Brooklyn NY and their once established community garden. It gave a counterpart to having a community garden in a diverse neighborhood. Instead the diversity brought tension to the garden (Thrasher, 159). Electronic documents now available will show that the SCA community garden has support from the community and partners who want to invest. I am grateful and believe this kind of sustainability will be a fundamental piece in evaluating regions as I move forward in my academic career of public health policy.

There is more than one tie to my academia that binds to this project. While taking Health Promotion: Theory and Practice, I was able to adopt the methods used from program planning. In creating a program to improve the health of a community, first I needed to build a relationship with the partners within it and understand the communities need; to make the program successful. The relationship between producing a need for an archived product and creating a program to help establish better food access, is the communities themselves making commitments to improve the overall wellbeing, development, faith, and trust to keep a sense of community. A 2010 study evaluated community engagement and research The National Institute

of Health and Council of Public Representatives emphasize on the frameworks created on values, strategies, and community engagement in research. Upon using this framework, the hope is that the implementations improve community research, to understand the principles of community needs, and form positive partnerships among those communities (Ahmed and Palermo, 2010).

It is authentic when an institution of higher education seeks out community engagement because it views such engagement as opportunity for collaboration, partnership, maximize the greater good concept, and raise value in service activities, etc. (Furco, 387). I believe I have achieved wonderful academia ties and reached an authenticity in my work, because the Health and Wellness department at UNC Asheville has shown authenticity in the community and campus they are in. As I move forward into my academic career my aspiration to learn, educate, and continue research into growth and development; whether that is in human, professional, community, or globally, the ties that bind are those related to the authentic work I have done.

Conclusion

The major takeaway from this project for me was the gathering of knowledge and insight into the Shiloh Community Association (SCA) commitment towards keeping their community sustainable. Shiloh's history going back to the late 19th century, was an important foundational aspect of Asheville, N.C. An important highlight to recognize is their once displaced community from the Biltmore property. Despite their displacement, Shiloh has showcased sustaining their community. As I went through the SCA documents to label and organize, the biggest insightful-takeaway wasn't the content, but was the consistency of the content going back at least a decade. If I can recognize that through viewing, while helping to create the electronic archive for easier accessibility to the partners, affected communities and society; then perhaps they can to. The value in this project is producing a product that increases protection of long term community records and their commitment to improving it. As a student majoring in Health and Wellness at UNC Asheville, community engagement has been cultivated and strongly supported. Authenticity is reflected by the Health and Wellness department and its implementation of community engagement efforts

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