

CULTURAL DEMOLITION: WHAT WAS LOST WHEN EUGENE
RAZED ITS FIRST BLACK NEIGHBORHOOD?

by

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In the 1940s, Eugene, Oregon's first African-American neighborhood took root on a riverbank north of the city. In 1949, county officials demolished the homes and church of the ad hoc community and relocated the residents. In the 21st century, no physical evidence of the former neighborhood remains, but the history continues to circulate among Eugene's contemporary African-American community. This thesis documents the history of Eugene's first black neighborhood, examines the roles that race and class played in its demolition, and develops recommendations for public commemoration. To do so, it critically examines methods of historic preservation and their relationship to sites of intangible history. Through an analysis of various models of commemoration, a multi-disciplinary approach emerges that may apply to similar sites.

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For my husband and my parents: They are the inspirations behind this work and all others.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: GOALS AND CHALLENGES

We may study the disenfranchised, the oppressed, or the disadvantaged within their spatial context, but we seem repeatedly to overlook a thorough and hard-hitting examination of the role played by the deepest structures--including especially the complicity of the built environment--in maintaining the status quo.

-- Dianne Harris¹

America's long history of racial injustice has led to discriminatory policies in all sectors and spheres of public life. No single governing body or agency has been responsible for all race-based policies, and it seems that no single governing body or agency has been free of them. Even in the practice of historic preservation, cultural prejudice has had unfortunate repercussions. Traditionally, practitioners have focused almost exclusively on the evolution of European American history.² This trend is rooted in the early movement's efforts to save such worthy buildings related to our national identity as George Washington's ancestral home, Mt. Vernon.³ However, as the institutional structure of the movement grew, it continued to favor buildings erected as

¹ Dianne Harris, "Seeing the Invisible: Reexamining Race and Vernacular Architecture," *Journal of Vernacular Architecture Forum* 13, no. 2 (2006/2007): 96-105.

² Antoinette J. Lee, "The Social and Ethnic Dimensions of Historic Preservation," in *A Richer Heritage*, ed. Robert E. Stipe (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 385-386.

³ Diane Lea, "America's Preservation Ethos," in *A Richer Heritage*, ed. Robert E. Stipe (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 2-3.

status symbols for European American leaders. This preference for European style and architectural refinement appears to have defined the movement up through the mid-20th Century, when the National Historic Preservation Act was passed in 1966. As preservationist Antoinette J. Lee writes, “Architects of the mid-1960s played a major role in the development of the legislation, and their focus was on high-style architecture.”⁴ As such, preservation became an elitist proposition concerned principally with aesthetic (rather than social) conditions, and reflections of events tied to our intellectual and political history.

Now that many 21st century preservationists embrace a more inclusive and multi-cultural definition of the “historic” aspects of the field, we face a serious challenge; it is already too late to save the best of the nation’s simpler buildings—especially those associated with African, Latino/Latina, Native American, and Asian history. Demolition was a common end under urban renewal for resources associated with minority populations, including homes, neighborhoods and their attendant schools, commercial buildings and places of worship. With their loss, opportunities for preservation, stewardship and education were lost as well.

While the motives behind demolition deserve further analysis, this study is most concerned with the social implications of such demolition. The National Park Service conducted a Cultural Needs Assessment in 2002 and found that out of 76,000 properties in the National Register of Historic Places, only 823 were associated with African-

⁴ Lee, “Social and Ethnic Dimensions,” 385.

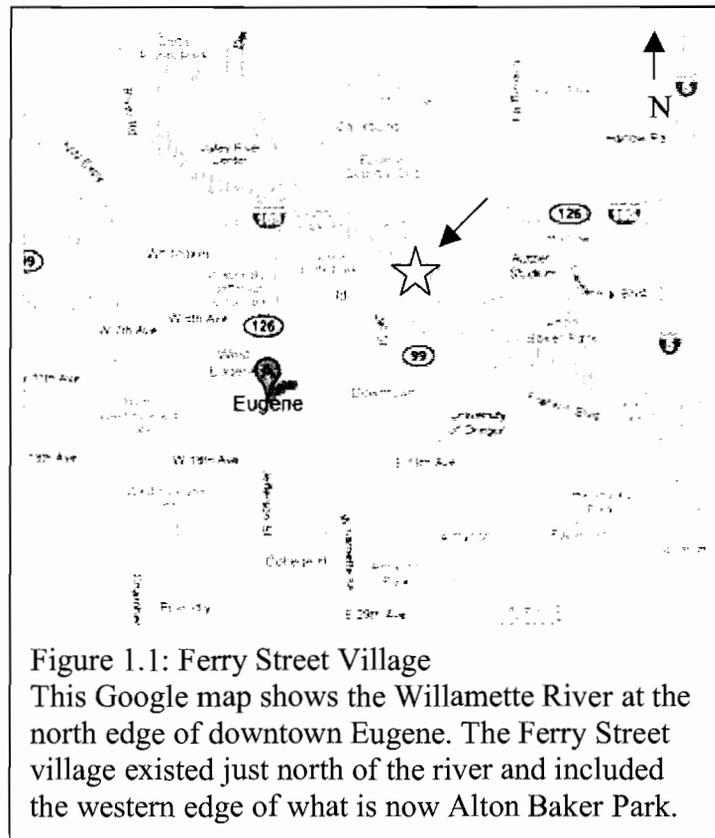
American history, 35 with Asian and 12 with Hispanic heritage.⁵ As historian Fath Davis Ruffins notes, only “four African American women officially appear on the national landscape of historic preservation. Their names are Harriet Tubman, Mary McLeod Bethune, Madam C. J. Walker, and Maggie Lena Walker.”⁶ This imbalance does not have to be consciously malicious to have a negative affect. If preservationists fail to acknowledge the history and struggles of a great many citizens, we not only fail to tell an accurate, multicultural story of American history but we lose the opportunity to inspire advocacy and pride amongst those uncelebrated Americans.

Clearly, the same argument could apply to innumerable cultural groups. Preservationists could commemorate more completely our nation’s labor history, or the struggle for gay and lesbian rights, or women’s history, but this study concerns itself with a particular challenge: how to recognize and commemorate sites associated with important African-American history even when demolition or neglect has adversely affected the integrity of these particular historic resources.

This study takes as its subject what has been called the “Ferry Street village” or “Tent City,” an informal neighborhood that formed temporarily on the north bank of the Willamette River north of Eugene, Oregon and existed from approximately 1945 to 1950 (See Figure 1 below).

⁵ Ned Kaufman, *Cultural Heritage Needs Assessment* (Washington D.C., National Park Service: 2004), 1.

⁶ Fath Davis Ruffins, “Four African American Woman on the National Landscape” in *Restoring Women’s History through Historic Preservation*, ed. Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 58.



The site retains high cultural significance, and its history resonates with contemporary residents of various ethnic backgrounds. However, the site was reclaimed for public use many years ago, the houses demolished, the families relocated, and the landscape cleared of all visible evidence of their habitation. Currently, no physical detail communicates the site’s history as the first neighborhood built and managed by the first generation of African-American families to settle in Eugene. In fact, much of the original site has only one “character-defining feature;” it looks virtually indistinguishable from any other commercial district bordering a central city.

Perhaps this focus raises an obvious question: “Why would preservationists choose to commemorate a site that has lost its buildings and lacks integrity?” This study argues

that an absence of tangible resources should not be considered synonymous with a lack of historical significance. Historical significance can be present in the associative meanings within a landscape, in the lessons of lived history, in the subversive meanings of sites long reclaimed by the dominant culture, or in social and political battles won and lost over a piece of land. As preservationist Carroll Van West says, “Architectural integrity is the most loaded cultural construct in all preservation literature and practice.”⁷ Our problem, he says, is our “unwillingness to constantly test our assumptions about the assessment of significance.”⁸ This study agrees that our criteria for “significance” and “integrity” should be under constant reevaluation, especially within the preservation field.

GOALS FOR THE STUDY

The National Park Service, which manages the National Register of Historic Places, has responded in recent decades to academic and professional calls for more ethnically and culturally diverse listings.⁹ However, a review of preservation literature shows that there are practical challenges associated with preserving a more diverse collection of historic sites. They tend to fall into three general categories:

⁷ Carroll Van West, “Assessing Significance and Integrity in the National Register Process: Questions of Race, Class and Gender,” *Preservation of What, For Whom?: A Critical Look at Historic Significance*, Michael A. Tomlan, ed. (National Council for Preservation Education, 1999) 486.

⁸ Van West, “Assessing Significance,” 490.

⁹ To review newly established goals for the national preservation program, view the recommendations developed through the Preserve America Summit, which took place in 2006, 40 years after the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act: www.preserveamerica.gov/docs/Executive_Summary_lr.pdf.

1. Sites of cultural significance associated with ethnic history have been disproportionately lost to redevelopment, urban renewal, and benign neglect.¹⁰ It is, therefore, difficult to find good examples, and it is particularly difficult for culturally significant buildings to meet the criteria for architectural integrity necessary for a listing on the National Register of Historic Places.
- 2: Even if they avoid demolition, the simplest vernacular buildings are often constructed of impermanent materials including wood and will not survive as long as stone or brick buildings.¹¹ This was particularly true for the first buildings constructed at informal settlement sites like the one at the center of this study.¹²
- 3: The preservation field has been slow to attract a diverse, multi-cultural pool of professionals. If preservationists lack training or interest in assessing multi-ethnic architectural, cultural or historical resources, they may not recognize the cultural significance of sites and buildings within the neighborhoods, urban

¹⁰ References to demolished historic African-American neighborhoods are commonplace in preservation literature. For instance, Antoinette J. Lee argues that the 1966 Historic Preservation Act was partly a response to “the massive urban renewal and transportation projects of the 1950s and 1960s that had wiped out urban neighborhoods where ethnic groups had made their homes.” “Social and Ethnic Dimensions,” 386.

¹¹ For a discussion of the impermanence of vernacular forms, see Leland Roth’s analysis of poteaux-en-terre construction techniques in *American Architecture* (Cambridge: Westview Press, 2001) 43-45.

¹² Evidence of the impermanence for early settlements, according to Edward A. Chappell, can be found in the fact that very few 18th century homes remain in the Shenandoah Valley, even though replacement was financially infeasible for most farmers of the era. Had the buildings been sturdier, Chappell argues, they would have remained at the center of a series of additions. “Acculturation in the Shenandoah Valley: Rhenish Houses of the Massanutten Settlement” in *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*, ed. Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1986) 27-57.

centers and rural places they survey.¹³ Architectural historian Rebecca Ginsburg has noted this in her work:

There are likely a couple of reasons that it has taken longer for race to excite architectural historians' interests and to become a focus of our studies. The paucity of people of color in the discipline, which even the briefest glance at a disciplinary gathering such as the annual meeting of the [Society of Architectural Historians] reveals, is probably one factor.¹⁴

With these challenges in mind, this study is designed to achieve three main goals. The first is to explore and document the history of a site where the buildings associated with events of local history have disappeared from the landscape entirely. In this case study, all three of the challenges listed above applied.

- 1: The buildings were demolished as part of the Ferry Street Bridge reconstruction project.
- 2: The homes, outhouses and chapel that defined the community were built to be relatively impermanent to begin with—constructed of scrap lumber in some cases. Demolished long before they reached the fifty-year mark, these simple, hastily constructed buildings were never expected to survive as representation of their form, plan type or cultural expression.
- 3: These buildings were demolished before the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, and long before they would have been valued as sites of local historic significance. It is only very recently that preservation professionals have recognized or advocated for the significance of vernacular,

¹³ Lee, “Social and Ethnic Dimensions,” 397.

¹⁴ Rebecca Ginsburg, reviewing *Sites of Memory: Perspectives on Architecture and Race* by Craig E. Barton in *The Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 61, no. 1 (Mar., 2002), pp. 119.

African-American buildings and acknowledged the significance of sites associated with the evolution of race relations in this country.

The second goal of this study is to explore potential models for commemoration. Sites like this one are extremely important to their local communities; yet, no plaque has been hung, no interpretation is occurring, no local or national list of historic properties acknowledges it. No matter how hard a visitor looks for physical evidence of the lives of Eugene's first African-American families, none remains on this site.

However, there are precedents for commemoration. To develop a set of recommendations, this study rests on the theoretical work of the "new" social historians and the "new" architectural historians.¹⁵ As such, this study pays particularly close attention to those scholars who integrate ethnic history and everyday architecture into the fields of preservation, cultural landscape preservation, architectural history, archaeology and folklore. In these conservation-minded fields, and in the communities they address, models for commemoration are not limited to inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places.

The third goal is to make recommendations that might be applied not only to this site but to similar sites of intangible history—namely, history that leaves no tangible mark on the landscape.¹⁶ The families considered in this study were not the first to lose

¹⁵ Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman, "Toward a New Architectural History," in *Perspective in Vernacular Architecture, IV*, 1-6.

¹⁶ A related concept, called "intangible cultural heritage," has been developed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Intangible cultural heritage embraces the following: oral traditions and expressions including language, the performing arts, social practices and rituals, and knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe. For more information, visit: www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00003.

their homes to urban redevelopment projects. It is the author's hope that they will not be the last to see their history studied, valued, and commemorated.

These goals arise from examination of the following questions: What roles did race, class, and urban renewal play in the demolition of Eugene's first black neighborhood? And what can be saved and savored from this site's associated history?

To address these questions, the researcher employs two primary methods. First, historical inquiry allows for a close reading of the public documents, oral histories, interview transcripts and other primary and secondary documents related to the site's era of significance: the late 1940s.¹⁷ Secondly, a case study approach allows the researcher to review potential models for commemoration from a variety of disciplines and make recommendations for their application at this location.

To understand the need for such a study, it is important to recognize that the loss of all buildings associated with this single dispersed community makes traditional historic preservation impossible without some adjustments. The National Register of Historic Places protects the quality of its architectural listings by defining "significance" as a combination of historical relevance and resource integrity from a stated "period of significance." Though other criteria exist to document and commemorate other physical resources, for sites that lack resource integrity, new tools for preservation and commemoration may be more useful if we are to acknowledge the great variety of America's tangible and intangible resources. In a sense, collaboration between fields is already happening. The preservation field is changing. It is overlapping the fields of

¹⁷ These resources, which primarily include reports, memoirs, oral histories and newspaper articles, are detailed in Chapter 3. The era of significance is derived from the years of occupation: 1945 to 1949.

cultural geography, historical archaeology, anthropology, folklore, green building and cultural landscape studies. As various conservation-minded fields expand their professional mandates and advocate for new architectural and cultural resources, partnerships and new interdisciplinary models will undoubtedly emerge.

SITE SELECTION

Any number of sites could be said to embody lost history—historic evidence that has disappeared from the landscape. Our urban fabric has changed tremendously in the last forty years while downtowns have faced economic decline and suburbs and highway corridors have expanded.¹⁸ It is well known that numerous inner-city neighborhoods were identified during the early age of urban renewal as “slums” or “blighted neighborhoods”—terms that were used as catalysts for demolition.¹⁹ Many of these important urban places have lost all visible links to their historic pasts. However, Eugene, Oregon was chosen as the site for this study partly because of the city’s long and complex history with racial prejudice. In the 1940s, African-Americans could not locate safe housing within the city of Eugene. That is the main reason why a small number of

¹⁸ Though each downtown has faced different pressures, one of the most interesting and thorough examinations of the 1960s transformation of America’s downtowns can be found in Alison Isenberg’s excellent work, *Downtown America: A History of the Place and the People Who Made it* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

¹⁹ Though there are numerous published analyses of urban renewal and its affects on displaced residents, one of the most interesting is *Urban Renewal and the End of Black Culture in Charlottesville, Virginia*, which presents a survey of former residents of the Vinegar Hill neighborhood. James Robert Saunders and Renae Nadine Shackelford (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 1998).

families gathered on a riverbank outside the city limits and created a new ad hoc neighborhood.

Today, the Ferry Street village is remembered as an isolated but cohesive African-American community existing outside the city's boundaries, though an unknown number of white residents also settled in the area. The buildings belonging to the African-American families consisted of approximately five to ten homes and one independent church building, all wood-framed.²⁰ Some, like the chapel, were covered in canvas tent roofs.²¹ These buildings sat on the landscape for only a few brief years when a county order led to the site's evacuation and the demolition of its buildings.²² When the site was cleared, the families moved to three new sites on the boundaries of the city of Eugene: one to the southwest of the city, one to the southeast of the city, and one in the city's oldest neighborhood.²³

These details appear to be well known within Eugene's contemporary African-American community, and the story of the Ferry Street families has captured the attention of local scholars at the University of Oregon and Lane Community College. Folklorist John Fenn, with his University of Oregon students, is currently conducting oral histories with former residents. Also, the lives of the Ferry Street families have been documented in newspaper reports and local histories. However, little effort to date has been made to

²⁰ While sources disagree about the exact number of families living at the site, this appears to be the most accurate estimate, according to personal interviews with Mattie Reynolds and Lyllye Parker, May 2009.

²¹ See photo, page 84.

²² See evacuation order, dated July 16, 1949, which is reproduced on page 19.

²³ Mike Thoele, "Black Island in a Sea of White," in *The Eugene Register-Guard*, January 31, 1993. See page 61 for details.

place some permanent marker on the site to define the landscape as an African-American historic site. Instead, portions of the riverbank are interpreted as a memorial to Alton Baker, a well-known Eugene newspaper founder.

ANATOMY OF A STUDY

This study relies heavily on a national conversation still in progress amongst scholars about the value of social history. To clearly define this study's theoretical position, Chapter II surveys some of the key theoretical and methodological positions of preservationists and architectural historians interested in ethnic history, women's history and the power of place. As will be demonstrated, the new social history movement of the 1960s and 70s had a profound effect on the evolution of architectural history.²⁴ Through an examination of the theories associated with vernacular studies, as defined by contemporary scholars including Dell Upton and John Vlach (who focus on African-American architecture and other culturally diverse resources), and Kingston Heath (who has codified models of analysis for place-based studies), it becomes clear that even the most inclusive methods of inquiry do not easily embrace a site like this one, which has been cleansed of all aboveground historical evidence. For a site of such critical local importance, but such limited physical integrity, we must look to preservationists and historians seeking and celebrating intangible ethnic and women's history in the built environment. For this, we turn to scholars like Dolores Hayden and Gail Lee Dubrow.

²⁴ For a history of the evolution of the preservation movement and the participation of social historians, view Antoinette J. Lee's essay, "Historians as Managers of the Nation's Cultural Heritage" in *American Studies International* Volume XLII, nos. 2 & 3 (June-October 2004), 118-136.

We also look to those who have studied the loss of significant sites related to black history, most notably, Antoinette Lee and Diane Harris [Please see bibliography for specific sources]. These scholars challenge future preservationists to identify, study and ultimately preserve invisible history, and at least one opportunity for such study still exists at the original Ferry Street village site. It may yet yield below-ground resources. Therefore, this study also relies on the extremely valuable historical archaeological methods of James Deetz and others.

Chapter III presents data related to the Ferry Street Bridge community, its location on the site and its eventual demolition. As a former journalist, the researcher's goal is to preserve, on paper, the cultural imprints this community left on the city of Eugene by documenting what is known of the community's origins, its lifeways, its former architectural resources, and its relationship to the city of Eugene. Public documents, including city and county reports, newspaper reports, personal histories and scholarship are detailed along with transcripts from personal interviews. Though this record strives to be complete, it is inevitable that resources remain hidden. Therefore, this work will undoubtedly continue.

Chapter IV constructs the central narrative that has emerged from this data and analyzes the effects of social forces like race, class, and urban renewal. This chapter outlines the era of habitation and introduces a small amount of photographic evidence related to building type.

Chapter V addresses questions related to commemoration. This study looks closely at the National Register of Historic Places and its recent attempts to encompass a broader

preservation mandate. Coupling this analysis with a variety of commemoration methods employed by cultural landscape preservationists, folklorists, women's historians and others, this study concludes that a multidisciplinary approach to commemoration is necessary for sites like the Ferry Street village. As the literature shows, sites of intangible history will be one of the central challenges for preservation professionals in the years ahead. Partnerships among disciplines will likely yield the best solutions.

Chapter VI puts forth a series of recommendations that apply specifically to the site of study but that may also apply to similar sites that have lost evidence of their history.

Chapter VII draws a final set of conclusions regarding what roles race and class played in the demolition of Ferry Street village and suggests areas for further research.

CHAPTER II

THE “NEW PRESERVATION MOVEMENT”

“In order for scholars to avail themselves to the many levels of meaning that exist within a particular setting, we need to see the landscape as much as possible through the eyes of the people who use and shape it.”²⁵

- Kingston Heath

This thesis has, at its heart, a cultural bias in favor of preserving those objects, buildings, and cultural histories that have been traditionally ignored by early preservationists. However, it is hardly the first to take such an approach. Its theoretical position rests on the work of practitioners who combined the “new social history movement” of the 1960s and 70s with the study of buildings, their associated narratives, and other forms of material culture created by and for everyday participants. The relatively new fields of vernacular studies, paired with historical archaeology, cultural geography, cultural landscape studies, and women’s and ethnic studies have left an indelible imprint on architectural history and on the preservation movement as a whole.²⁶

²⁵ Kingston Heath, *Patina of Place: The Cultural Weathering of a New England Industrial Landscape* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 180.

²⁶ Preservationist Kingston Heath coined the term “the new preservation movement” to define a new branch of preservation theory that acknowledges and celebrates the “cultural weathering” that buildings and their settings evoke. This concept, which honors the multiple histories embedded in a site as it evolves over time, is particularly useful in envisioning a new set of preservation tools that compliment, rather than rely

An eloquent description of the new social architectural history movement comes from Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman, who quoted historian Cary Carson in their introduction to *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture IV*:

Recognition for history's neglected majority follows inevitably from the new emphasis historians are giving to society as a working organism, a community of individuals and groups who are mutually dependent on one another—top to bottom or bottom to top, it doesn't matter. This integrated, all-aboard view of society *is* fundamental to the New History perspective, as are the questions that flow from it: How were historic societies structured? How did their parts work together? What underlying forces eventually altered both structure and function?²⁷

This concept of society as a working organism, a single body made up of an infinite number of living parts, prepares the researcher to look at buildings and landscapes as dynamic places that have, as a defining characteristic, the tendency to change over time. They evolve as they are inhabited, abandoned, reinhabited, altered and embellished by new generations and new cultural groups. The physical evidence of this evolution has been called “cultural weathering” by preservationist and architectural historian, Kingston Heath: “In the process of cultural weathering, information, aspects of social practice, or design elements are disassociated from their original source. They are then reconstituted through the collective processing of ideas that are operational within a region to meet the particular needs of a new culture.”²⁸

exclusively on, the National Register of Historic Places' criteria for determining eligibility as it relates to one period of “primary significance” or one set of historical narratives. Instead, credence is given not only to makers and original users, but to how a resource is conceived, used, reused, and transformed in ways critical to our understanding of “place.”

²⁷ Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman, “Toward a New Architectural History,” in *Perspective in Vernacular Architecture, IV*, 4.

²⁸ Kingston W. Heath, *The Patina of Place: The Cultural Weathering of a New England Industrial Landscape* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), 177.

Though Heath's theory flows from his study of the cultural evolution of a regionally-specific form—the three-decker in New Bedford, Massachusetts—countless radical examples of altered buildings are visible in our everyday evolving landscape: creative entrepreneurs re-envision industrial buildings as entertainment spaces, warehouses are transformed into lofts, new small businesses germinate within historic downtown commercial buildings. All these familiar urban transformations, many of them noted and celebrated for the first time in 1961 by urban design theorist Jane Jacobs, leave new layers of what Heath calls “patina” atop the surfaces of our built resources, which he has referred to as “a type of cultural stratigraphy.”²⁹ They also tend to compromise architectural integrity, when viewed by traditional preservationists.

The National Register of Historic Places, though designed to encompass all historic resources, values a certain set of ideals, the highest of which may be “integrity.” If integrity in location, design, materials, setting, workmanship, feeling and association must be maintained in order for a historic building to be listed as architecturally significant, then buildings that have changed over time can lose their value as preservation-worthy examples. It is true that those changes that are fifty years old or older may gain significance of their own. But Heath and others would argue that for structures with complex social and ethnic histories, change over time provides new layers of meaning and association that *add* to a building's significance rather than detract from it, even if those changes are recent. This is a fairly radical position for a field that has traditionally frozen buildings in time and interpreted them as calcified artifacts instead of

²⁹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York: The Modern Library, 1993).

examples of heritage transformation. As preservationist Howard L. Green sees this conundrum, “the concept of historical significance that the preservation movement uses is derived from an outmoded, positivist concept of what history is and how it should be approached.”³⁰ But, he warns, “when we attempt to bring our work into line with current historiographical thinking, we risk losing support both from our friends in the local history world who want a fixed, solid past that stays put and from our already-reluctant ‘allies’ in the world of development and land use planning.”³¹ This is particularly true of planners who focus professionally on traditional neighborhood development.

Historic preservationists may have once favored a National Register full of elite, Victorian and pre-Victorian homes adorned with pooling draperies and finely carved furnishings as museum settings, but in recent years, evidence suggests that the “new social history movement” has already altered preservation practice and interpretive preference with regard to educational outreach. Preservationists, historians and heritage consumers are placing a new emphasis on working class experiences and on cultural and ethnic history. Working class museums like the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City, for example, provide a wonderful 21st century model for working class commemoration. By allowing two distinct apartments inhabited by two distinct cultural groups in two different eras to coexist within one building, the museum illuminates the earlier lives of working class people and celebrates the cultural change that occurred to

³⁰ Howard L. Green, “The Social Construction of Historical Significance,” *Preservation for What, for Whom?: A Critical Look at Historical Significance*, ed Michael A. Tomlan (National Council for Preservation Education, 1999), 85.

³¹ *Ibid.*

the neighborhood and its tenement spaces over time. Further, such multilayered interpretive programs allow greater accessibility to often-marginalized cultural groups.

However, by celebrating cultural weathering, preservationists place increased value on *regular people* and their relationships with places and begin to devalue the concept of architectural integrity tied exclusively to buildings and artifacts apart from the meanings invested in them by their users. If we embrace change over time, then buildings are not so much valued for the architectural integrity they retain from their period of significance, but for how that integrity has been compromised in ways that transmit other important narratives significant to our understanding of a time, place, or people.

Clearly, the Ferry Street village cannot make use of the theory of cultural weathering to prepare a plan for preservation or commemoration. Cultural weathering, like other forms of traditional preservation, still emphasizes the building and artifacts as the vessels by which history is manifested. However, the value system behind this concept is useful. If there is significance to the Ferry Street village site, it is embodied in the relationship between people and place. Though we can no longer preserve the Ferry Street buildings and read them as scholarly texts, we can preserve or commemorate the relationship that remains between a local people and the place they once inhabited. The landscape is the vessel that once encompassed the events of the Ferry Street village's history, and its former residents are the keepers of its cultural memory.

Traditional preservationists may disagree with the ultimate point of this argument, claiming that "historic preservation" should not dilute the pool of significant historic resources by creating new models for preserving sites empty of historical signifiers. As

architectural historian Arleen Pabón observed when looking at which buildings we study and why: “Many years ago, when I first tried to understand why historic preservation (or architectural history for that matter) seldom dealt with aspects of *herstory* (as opposed to history), I realized that many academics and preservation practitioners had a narrow vision.”³² The narrow vision to which Pabón refers may cause some preservationists to ignore historical resources that do not resemble other resources listed in the National Register of Historic Places. However, this study argues that the social history embodied in a place can sometimes provide such stark cultural realities related to the evolution of our social awareness that their stories must be treated as culturally significant artifacts. This point of view acknowledges that historians and preservationists are privileged participants who interpret history. As Green says, “The event itself, the facts, do not say anything, do not impose any meaning. It is the historian who speaks, who imposes a meaning.”³³ If we assume that preservationists take some responsibility for preserving educational narratives, then we must broaden our vision. As Pabón warns:

We tend to ascribe cultural significance to artifacts that we can see or, at the most intangible, to places directly related to events we define as significant or to sites that we believe physically represent historic events... Yet tangibles are a trap that cause us to believe that only “real things” (as in physical) matter. This is particularly the case regarding architecture.³⁴

Again, this is not the first study to attest to the historic value of places absent of buildings. The landscape preservation field concerns itself almost exclusively with the

³² Arleen Pabón, “Africanisms and Puerto Rican Architecture” in *CRM Journal* (Fall 2003), 15.

³³ Green, “Social Construction”, 89.

³⁴ Ibid.

topography, the uses, and the design of spaces. Likewise, historic preservation has always made room for resources like historic battlefields. Regulated by the National Park Service, the Register is intrinsically tied to the conservation of natural monuments and open spaces. Likewise, in recent years, sacred Native American grounds and less temporal cultural properties including songs, dances, crafts and languages have been preserved as traditional cultural properties and intangible cultural heritage respectively. These resources are protected for their cultural significance and in need of protection because of their fragile and threatened state.³⁵ These examples provide proof that the National Register process has become more fluid in recent years, or is being used more broadly, perhaps because its ultimate value is in its ability to shine a light on worthy places.

Inclusion in the National Register is often called “honorary.” It does not protect a building from demolition or neglect, but it directs our attention to that resource, asking us to engage with it in order to glean something from history that we have missed. One could say that historic preservation’s most important job is to document historic resources and then draw our attention to the significance of places we pass on a daily basis without noticing. Recognition and acknowledgement is particularly important for sites where history is entirely invisible. Through public commemoration, we allow some of our most mundane, seemingly indistinct places to provide unique lessons in social evolution. Again, Pabón provides a related argument: “Absent architectural artifacts might still be

³⁵ For a description of traditional cultural properties, see Patricia L. Parker and Thomas F. King, *National Register Bulletin: Guidelines for Evaluating Traditional Cultural Properties* (Washington D.C.: National Park Service, 1998).

audible precisely because of their silence...I believe in privileging absence over presence.”³⁶

Though Pabón is clearly an ally for the preservation of intangible history, it is noteworthy that she does not put forth a commemorative model for others to follow. In fact, this study discovered only a few models for commemorating historic sites that have lost their tangible resources in preservation literature, though many notable scholars in the preservation field acknowledge the need for such models.³⁷ This suggests that though the new social history movement has altered the way we think about buildings and places, we are still in the process of learning new ways to advocate for them.

The concept of invisible history has been most eloquently addressed in the article “Seeing the Invisible,” in which architectural historian Diane Harris tells the story of the first black family to move into a ranch house in Levittown, Pennsylvania.³⁸ The Meyers family was severely harassed for three months though they meticulously met, and then surpassed, the aesthetic norms of the neighborhood: “Those who protested the Myers family’s occupation understood that their houses had been designed for a generically

³⁶ Pabón, “Africanisms and Puerto Rican Architecture,” 27.

³⁷ Visit the *International Journal of Intangible History* for more discussion on the topic of discovering the intangible: www.ijih.org.

³⁸ Diane Harris, “Seeing the Invisible: Reexamining Race and Vernacular Architecture” in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 13, no. 2 (2006-2007), 96-105. See also Dell Upton, “Seen, Unseen and Scene,” Jennifer Nardone, “Roomful of Blues: Jukejoints and the Cultural Landscape of the Mississippi Delta,” and Rebecca Ginsberg, “Come in the Night” for discussions of “seeing” invisible history.

conceived white audience, and their outrage was linked to clearly articulated fears related to issues of identity and its links to property rights and values.”³⁹

This elegant assessment of the meanings associated with the Myers house shows how a site of cultural warfare can hide within a bland suburban landscape in which everything appears ordinary. Harris’s example further illustrates how loose the relationship can be between architectural significance and historic significance. The historic relevance of the Meyers house was entirely invisible; it looked just like its neighbors. In fact, our curiosity about the dramatic events of the Civil Rights movement might be more satisfied were the landscape wiped clean, the house eradicated, the family relocated and the cultural rift in the neighborhood sewn up around their absence. In the case of the Ferry Street village, that is exactly what happened, and it is the absence of African-Americans on the contemporary landscape that most poignantly tells the story of the site’s central role in the birth of Eugene, Oregon’s Civil Rights movement.

By accepting the value of the invisible or intangible history embodied in the former Ferry Street village landscape and by emphasizing the relationship between this unique place and its former residents over issues of architectural integrity, we can begin to build an argument for significance that places the Ferry Street site alongside other important historic buildings in Eugene, Oregon. The next step is to explore some of the theoretical constructs that might support such a goal.

³⁹ Harris, “Seeing the Invisible,” 98.

VERNACULAR STUDIES

The Ferry Street buildings cannot be analyzed the way that seminal vernacular scholars like architectural historian John Vlach pursued the origins of the “shotgun house,” which he traced to its African roots.⁴⁰ Further, a typology worthy of Henry Glassie and his meticulous study, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, cannot be developed.⁴¹ To perform such analysis, one would have to have access to the buildings themselves. The community’s residences would be measured, drawn, compared to other examples, and then distilled into a series of identifiable form types, geographic distribution, and use. Perhaps then we could choose to protect them.

Instead, this study must proceed without the benefit of material evidence. It must hold the value of social history up to the value of architectural history. By doing so, this study seeks to address the concerns of historians who have claimed since the 1980s that: “historical associations are having to play second fiddle to unreasonable standards of architectural or structural integrity.”⁴²

Though no aboveground resources are available for study, written documents and oral histories do provide some details of architectural expression. For example, we can conclude that the structures at the Ferry Street site were decidedly expedient. Some would characterize them as vernacular. They were typically simple, small, one and two-

⁴⁰ John Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Cleveland, Ohio: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978).

⁴¹ Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1975).

⁴² Antoinette J. Lee, “Discovering Old Cultures in the New World: The Role of Ethnicity,” *The American Mosaic: Preserving a Nation’s Heritage*, Robert E. Stipe, ed. (Washington D.C.: United States Committee International Council on Monuments and Sites, 1987), 202.

room buildings constructed of easily accessible lumber.⁴³ They had no plumbing or electricity. The exception was the Reynolds house, which was a finished three-bedroom home made of the lumber from Sam Reynolds' own sawmill. This house did have electricity.⁴⁴

What does it mean that these homes were “vernacular?” As Dell Upton, one of the most respected and oft-cited theorists on vernacular architecture attests: “I have always avoided defining the term... Vernacular architecture studies will have reached maturity when we have defined an inclusive approach to the study of all architecture that will eliminate the need for such an exclusive label.”⁴⁵

Towards an inclusive approach, Upton's article, “The Power of Things,” presents four promising categories of scholarship related to vernacular structures.⁴⁶ “Object oriented studies” concerns itself with the facts related to the building itself and to the history of architectural elements, style, and traditions of craftsmanship. The second, Upton calls, “socially oriented studies.” This vein of inquiry compares buildings in order to examine cultural shifts in living arrangements and wealth, over time. Attention is given to relative size and relative permanence, for instance. The third, “culturally oriented studies,” is the closest to the method employed in this study. It encompasses “questions of ethnicity, interethnic influence, and acculturation.” The fourth, “symbolically oriented

⁴³ Willie C. Mims, interviewed by the author, Eugene, OR, April 2009.

⁴⁴ Lyllye Parker and Mattie Reynolds, interviewed by the author, Eugene OR, May 2009.

⁴⁵ Dell Upton, “The Power of Things: Recent Studies in American Vernacular Architecture” in *American Quarterly* 35, 1983, 263.

⁴⁶ Upton, “Power of Things,” 335.

studies,” is best understood as questioning the symbolic meanings, the signs, embodied within architectural features.

In examining these four areas of inquiry, the reader may note that each of them has, at its core, a detailed, deep analysis of the form and structure and design of buildings. Even when studying cultural or social content, Upton never looks away from the built form, but points to the primacy of scholars like Abbott Lowell Cummings, Henry Glassie and John Michael Vlach for their deep and probing analysis of architectural types. While all three of these scholars are referenced within this work, clearly their methodologies are of limited assistance at Ferry Street.

However, the Ferry Street site did at one time include vernacular buildings and did, at one time, embody all the clues for analysis that these scholars would attend to. Therefore, in spite of the fact that these methodologies cannot be utilized, except distantly, some of the related concepts are important to the definition of the resources that once existed.

While the definition of terms like “vernacular” can vary, the term at its simplest refers to “ordinary buildings and landscapes.”⁴⁷ The Ferry Street village definitely consisted of simple buildings, but they were not “ordinary” in that they did not resemble the homes of typical Eugene residents. The concept of “vernacular housing types” can be expanded, however, to include “those buildings made by common builders in an informal way, rather than by architects using design methodologies”⁴⁸ Therefore, “vernacular

⁴⁷ Vernacular Architecture Forum, www.vafweb.org/learning/whatis.html [accessed April 4, 2009].

⁴⁸ Ethno-architecture, www.ethnoarchitecture.com/web/articles/article/06110-01arts/ [accessed April 4, 2009].

architecture” is sometimes said to encompass the ninety-five percent of the entire built environment not designed by architects. The most complete definition of vernacular architecture comes from the *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*:

comprising the dwellings and all other buildings of the people. Related to their environmental contexts and available resources they are customarily owner- or community-built, utilizing traditional technologies. All forms of vernacular architecture are built to meet specific needs, accommodating the values, economies and ways of life of the cultures that produce them.

This definition addresses the concept of “needs” and as such, provides the best model for what were, essentially, settlement structures. For the sake of this study, “vernacular architecture” identifies housing of high practical value and expedience. To take this idea further, the Ferry Street “settlers” claimed an uninhabited territory and constructed dwellings quickly, using the most efficient, nearby materials. They improved those dwellings over time and then they lost their claim on the land and the buildings were destroyed.

What we borrow from the field of vernacular architectural studies is a respect for utilitarian buildings, their importance in the process of landscape evolution, and the meanings they held for the people who inhabited them. The fact that this site could be loosely classified as a settlement site adds further nuance to its cultural significance. Were a historian to stumble upon a settlement site from the 1840s, the simple structures found there would clearly be considered significant. They would, in spite of their aesthetics or condition, pinpoint the beginning of life in a region. The fact that this site was inhabited not in the 1840s, but in the 1940s, does not limit its significance as the first

settlement site for Eugene's African-American families. And the fact that its buildings have been lost does not limit the historic value of the site.

Consider historian Pat Small's argument for the study of "mute landscapes":

Scholars of vernacular architecture and material culture are well aware of the wealth of knowledge we can glean from seemingly mute ordinary landscapes and artifacts. When examined within the context of contemporary documents... even ephemeral landscapes... can be mined for cultural insights. [We are reminded] how ephemeral meaning can be too – shifting or being lost with changes in perspective or the passage of time. In recent years, scholars increasingly have turned their attention to the more recent past, shedding light on our current cultural assumptions or blind spots in the process. Race, gender, and childhood are certainly still flashpoints for modern society.⁴⁹

As a basis for analysis then, we must consider that these homes were efficiently constructed, simple structures that met the practical needs of the new arrivals. Their style and size may have had less to do with issues of race, class or culture than with a settler's needs for immediate shelter. In that way, they resemble early shelters from other settlements. These houses were significantly smaller and less permanent than the great majority of housing in the surrounding communities, but they were also built to be impermanent dwellings on borrowed land. Though they have been eradicated, it is possible that these buildings and their residents left artifacts of their early settlement.

HISTORICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Historical archaeology, as an approach to inquiry, would be highly beneficial in the study of the Ferry Street site. The field concerns itself specifically with excavations of

⁴⁹ Nora Pat Small, Abigail Van Slyck, "A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890-1960" reviewed in *Buildings and Landscapes* 16, no 1 (Spring 2009), 118.

sites inhabited after the advent of historical recordation. It uses, as a set of tools, artifacts paired with written records.

While historical documents are already central to this study, no archaeological excavations have yet taken place at the site of the Ferry Street village. A local archaeologist, considering whether such a study would be fruitful, warned that if evidence were found, it would be difficult to link to any one family or even to the African-American residents who lived there. For instance, what does a black family's assemblage look like as opposed to a white family's? Only through former residents might archaeologists receive enough guidance to discover the hidden artifacts related to their habitation.

The pioneering historical archaeologist James Deetz believed that archaeology related to African-American history had some of the greatest potential for new knowledge. He claimed that historical archaeology had the ability to bring back into the picture a cultural group that was virtually ignored by historians.⁵⁰ Though he was surely referring to earlier generations of African-Americans and the complex social norms associated with slavery, he maintained that "African American archaeology has assumed increasing importance, taking a central place in American historical archaeology... Far from a simple matter of acculturation of Africans to the dominant Anglo-American lifeways, a complex mixing and reformulation of components of both cultures took place, particularly in the American South."⁵¹

⁵⁰ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Anchor Books, 1977), 213.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Though Deetz quotes from studies of excavated slave cabins and from John Vlach's study of the shotgun house, he also provides hope that a 20th century site like Ferry Street could provide some new understanding of culture and lifeways in the era in which it briefly existed. Cuts of meat provide details related to diet and nutrition. Bottles also speak to consumption habits, and the footprints of buildings can speak to the relationships of family members to one another. For example, Vlach states: "In room size and arrangement, it is clear that the shotgun house reflects a very different proxemic order, one of closer social interaction, which he refers to as 'an architecture of intimacy.'"⁵²

Though we can examine the Ferry Street site through the historic record, archaeology could potentially bring artifacts to light that would provide some material culture for interpretation. This field and its analysis of relatively recent history provide an instructive model for future research.

A NOTE ON ASSESSING CULTURAL MEANING

While this study cannot be divorced from its focus on the African-American history of Eugene, it does not seek to treat the former Ferry Street residents as distant subjects of study but as current and former participants in the patterns of Eugene's cultural maturity and evolution. As Rebecca Ginsberg reminds us: "Does the fact that these are significant places in the history of American race relations matter? If we

⁵² Deetz, *Small Things*, 217.

replaced the term ‘African American’ with ‘Polish’ or ‘French’... would it make a difference to the way we felt about memorializing these sites?”⁵³

With levity and wisdom, Ginsburg concludes that sites of relevant civil rights history need to be examined not as sites of black history “but as places where socially constructed notions of race and historical circumstance confronted one another and helped to change an entire nation.”⁵⁴

With her guidance, and the guidance of scholars from a variety of conservation-minded fields, we begin this analysis of the Ferry Street village with an annotated list of historic documents related specifically to the Ferry Street community, its location on the landscape, its lifeways, and its demolition.

⁵³ Ginsburg, reviewing *Sites of Memory*, 120.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

CHAPTER III

NARRATIVE AUTHORITY CREATES PUBLIC LEGENDS

“If you’re black and you’re new in this town, Ferry Street is one of the first stories that you hear.”

- Greg Evans, former Eugene mayoral candidate⁵⁵

PHYSICAL LOCATION

The Ferry Street village grew north of the Willamette River in Willakenzie, which was not annexed into the city of Eugene until after 1960.⁵⁶ The site’s era of significance lies between 1945 and 1950, which roughly encompasses the era of habitation.⁵⁷ The annexation history is particularly relevant as this site was outside the city limits at the time. It was a site of last resort on the outskirts of a city that did not welcome African-American renters or property owners. To see the site’s relation to the rest of downtown Eugene, view figures 3.1 and 3.2 below.

⁵⁵ Mike Thoele, *Black Island in a Sea of White*, *The Eugene Register-Guard*, January 31, 1993.

⁵⁶ Maura Johnson in conjunction with the Eugene Planning Division, *Willakenzie Area Plan Historic Context* (Eugene, OR, August 1989), 1.

⁵⁷ While defining the exact dates of habitation is difficult due to a lack of written records and limited access to the founding families, it is clear from first-person interviews with Mattie Reynolds and Lyllye Parker that the Reynolds family moved to the site in 1946 and that the site was cleared of homes and other personal property in July 1949. The end date is defined by a demolition order from the Lane County Commissioners dated July 16, 1949 and corroborated by stories in the daily newspaper, the *Eugene Register-Guard* from July 1949.

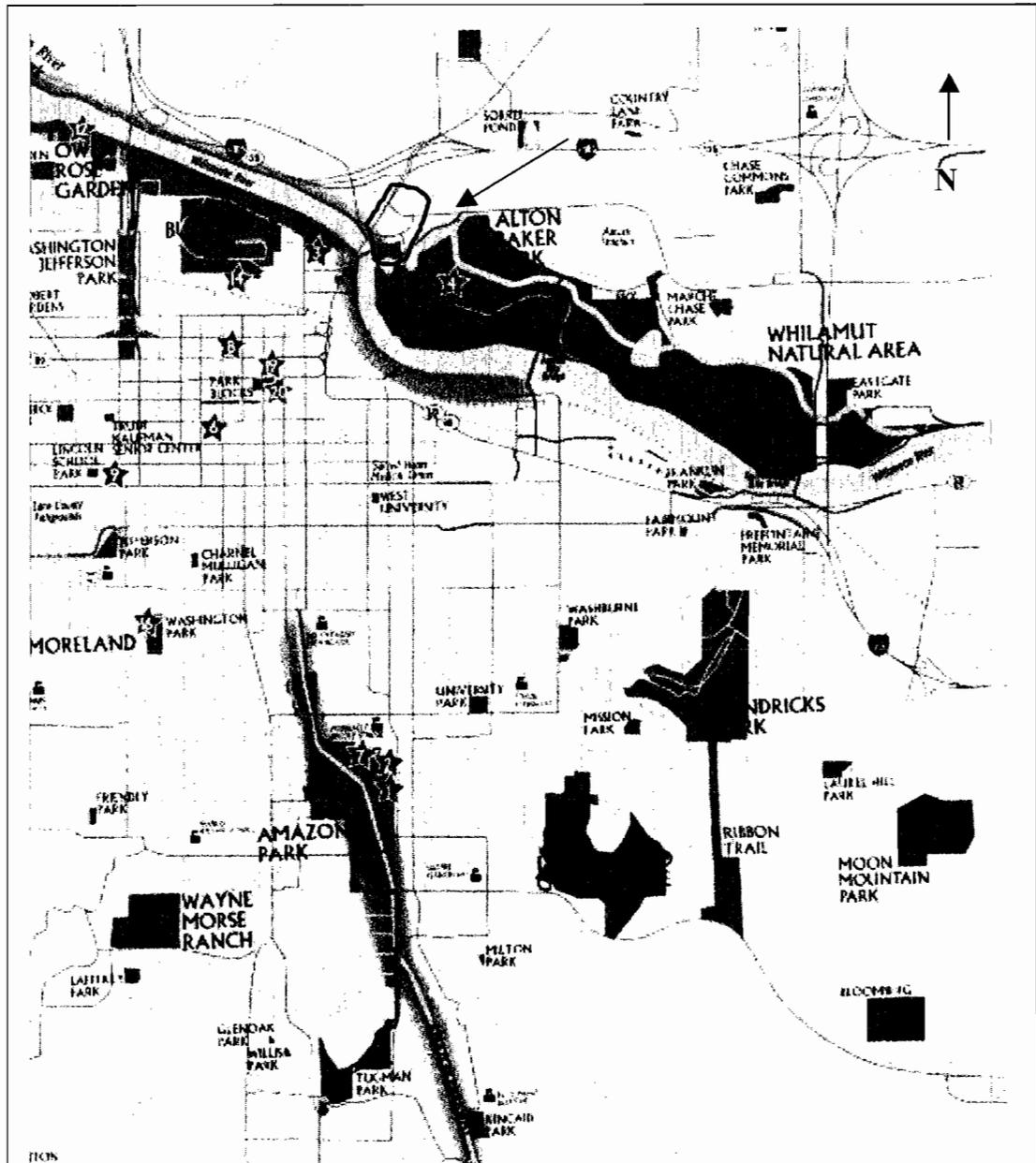


Figure 3.1: Modern Day Study Site

Though the boundaries of the Ferry Street site have been blurred over the years, this City of Eugene map, which includes stars for park amenities, shows how the rough outline of the village, bounded in black, overlaps the boundaries of today's Alton Baker Park (star four), which sits just east of the Ferry Street Bridge. The Ferry Street village site has been subsumed by the park and obscured by a series of new roads and commercial redevelopment. Even the Ferry Street Bridge has been altered. It was replaced with a new bridge after the site was evacuated.



Figure 3.2: Historic Aerial: Eugene, circa 1950

The area outlined in black roughly identifies the Ferry Street village. In the 1940s, the Willamette River represented the northern edge of the City of Eugene. The study site sits just north of this boundary on county land. Unfortunately, when enlarged, this photo cannot provide enough detail to identify the buildings within the Ferry Street village area as residences.

WHAT WE KNOW: UNEARTHING INTANGIBLE HISTORY

This study's examination of the Ferry Street Bridge community's history relied heavily on the collection and analysis of public documents related to Eugene in the 1940s and 50s. In order to examine fully the roles that race, class, and urban renewal played in the demolition of the Ferry Street buildings, it was necessary to review these records and create an annotated bibliography of those that were particularly relevant. While historical inquiry is an exciting and rewarding method for documenting and analyzing the history of a given place, it has some inherent drawbacks. Detailed briefly here, they may be instructive to future researchers.

In the case of African-American history in Eugene during the 1940s, historical resources are less than comprehensive. While local histories, university theses, photos and maps are abundant in the city's public and university libraries, these resources rarely treat African-American settlement history as an area of focus or study. Though the basic narrative structure related to the life and death of this community varies little from source to source, the details, including the date the community was founded, the number of residents, and even the year it was dispersed, have been points of disagreement among various primary and secondary sources. This is not surprising. The former residents who spoke with the author viewed the site from different perspectives. Some were adults at the time of settlement and others were children. Their stories have evolved over time to create flowing narratives saturated with cultural memory. This makes triangulation among sources, perhaps one of the most important means of authenticating details, a

complex and difficult task. Memory can only provide a blurry sketch of sixty-year old events.⁵⁸

Since the 1950s, the site of the Ferry Street village has been transformed by other cultural pursuits, namely Alton Baker Park, some suburban housing, and commercial ventures. Road names have been changed and it is difficult to reconcile contemporary maps with memories of the former landscape. Even when visiting the site, sources question fundamental relationships among features. When no accurate map of land uses is available, when the landscape is utterly changed, one can no longer say for sure how many structures were on the land, or how many families lived there at one time, or in what order they arrived or withdrew. Therefore, while this study addresses relatively recent history and the researcher has access to primary human sources—a luxury few historians enjoy—discrepancies regularly arise, and some appear irresolvable. Though it is difficult to accept, we may never know what this community looked like in its heyday or which families lived there during which timeframes. We will likely never find photographs of the interiors of these homes nor photographs of their demolition.

RESOURCES

Though photographic evidence is sparse, there are numerous written records available that reveal a narrative about the birth and death of the Ferry Street Bridge community. Here, we examine the story that emerges from the sources that remain. They

⁵⁸ See David Lowenthal's *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1985) for a discussion of the role of memory.

are examined in three distinct groups: public records, including memoirs, reports, census data, newspaper records, which track the events of the community's history, and contemporary oral histories with former residents.

PUBLIC RECORDS

ORDER OF EVICTION⁵⁹

Perhaps the most telling record to emerge from a public records search through county and city archives was the county order that brought the Ferry Street Bridge community to its end. In July of 1949, while housing shortages were the topic of local and national news, the Lane County commissioners passed an order demanding the evacuation of the Ferry Street Bridge community and the demolition of the homes within it.⁶⁰ According to the order, the community was given ten days to vacate the property. The order, which was part of the county's microfilmed archive of commissioners' orders in the Land Surveyor's office of the county's public administration building, was so faded it was nearly unreadable. A copy archived in the county commissioners' original ledgers was more readable. The best reproduction was provide by local historian Mark Harris. It is reproduced below (See Figure 3.3).

⁵⁹ Lane County Commissioners, Court Order, (Lane County, OR: July 16, 1949).

⁶⁰ Throughout the summer of 1949, the front sections of *The Eugene Register-Guard* featured news of local debates over rent control and of a national debate over the need for a new housing authority.

IN THE DISTRICT COURT OF THE COUNTY OF LANE, OREGON
Case No. 27-4430

WHEREAS the undersigned Judge of the District Court of the County of Lane, Oregon, has caused to be filed in said court a certain petition filed by the County of Lane, Oregon, for the purpose of vacating a certain bridge and approaching thereto, including the present so-called Ferry Street Bridge, in Eugene, Ore.,

WHEREAS certain persons are residing and remaining on said bridge and on the lands adjacent thereto from the County Court of Lane, Oregon, in violation of said order,

IT IS THEREFORE HEREBY ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED THAT ALL PERSONS NOW CAMPED OR OTHERWISE LIVING UPON PROPERTY OWNED BY LANE COUNTY, OREGON NEAR THE WILLAMETTE RIVER AND NEAR FERRY STREET BRIDGE, AND BOUNDED ON ONE SIDE BY WHAT IS KNOWN AS THE PATTERSON ISLAND ROAD AND THE WILLAMETTE RIVER ON THE OTHER SIDE, VACATE SAID PREMISES NOT LATER THAN 10 DAYS FROM THE DATE OF THIS NOTICE AND IF THEY FAIL TO DO VACATE THE SHERIFF IS ORDERED TO NOTIFY SAID PERSONS THEREOF BY ALL MEANS NECESSARY TO DO SO.

DATED AT EUGENE, LANE COUNTY, OREGON THIS 16 DAY OF JULY, 1949.

FILED
AT O'CLOCK M
JUL 16 1949
HARRY L. CHASE
COUNTY CLERK
BY Eugene [Signature]

[Signature]
JUDGE
[Signature]
COUNTY CLERK
[Signature]
COUNTY CLERK

Whereupon Court is hereby adjourned to meet Monday at 9 o'clock A. M.

Attest: _____ County Clerk
Eugene, Oregon, Monday, July 18, 1949
Court met pursuant to adjournment, present same as upon adjournment, when the following proceedings were had as follows, to-wit:
Deputy Judge
County Commissioner
County Commissioner
11th Judicial Day

Figure 3.3: Eviction Order, 1949
This July 16, 1949 order directed the residents of the Ferry Street Bridge settlement to either vacate the premises or be evicted on July 26, 1949.

It is worth noting that county commissioners' minutes would have been highly instructive regarding the public discussion surrounding the relocation of Ferry Street's residents. However, Lane County did not keep commissioners' minutes previous during this era. Therefore, there is no information regarding the public discussion or the names of advocates and opponents.

The same was true for the City Council. While the author had access to logs which included letters to the council and other forms of communication, no record of the city's decision making regarding Ferry Street was available. It is, therefore, difficult to track one of the more interesting and inaccessible elements of this history: the public process behind the decision to raze the neighborhood. Ideally, some record may yet emerge that describes how local governments perceived the village, discussed its existence on the landscape and made their choice to demolish it.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF EUGENE REPORT: "THE NEGRO IN EUGENE"⁶¹

*"Securing decent housing and adequate employment are the two most critical problems for the Negro in Eugene."*⁶²

The order to evacuate appears to be one of the first incidents that inspired residents within Eugene to consider the plight of African-American settlers living north

⁶¹ League of Women Voters of Lane County, "The Negro in Eugene," (Eugene, Or, 1952).

⁶² LWV, *Negro in Eugene*, 8.

of the river. Soon after the Ferry Street families were evicted, the League of Women Voters created a “Minorities Committee” that prepared an eight-page report with the stated goal “to gather information on and to put together a local picture of the most underprivileged group in our society.”⁶³ According to the report, “investigation should precede any pressure on governmental agencies... providing and spreading information is always one important form of League ‘action’.”⁶⁴ A number of facts are related: that there are “110 Negroes living in the Eugene-Springfield area,” and that a count from two months previous included another 50, but they had since moved away.⁶⁵ The report also details employment amongst this population. Fifty-three adults were surveyed, and another fourteen men were seeking work outside Eugene and were not available during the winter of 1950-51. Amongst the men, twenty-two were employed and nineteen were not. Amongst the women, eight were employed and eleven were not. Another seven women were housewives not seeking employment.

An attempt by the researcher to contact members of the committee was successful in only one case. Gerrie Andrews still resides in Eugene. However, she no longer remembers any details related to the report or to the African-American community in Eugene. All other attempts to reach former members were unsuccessful. Many of them were no longer alive; others were unreachable.

⁶³ LWV, *Negro in Eugene*, 1.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ LWV, *Negro in Eugene*, 2.

The importance of this report, which was furnished by Ken Guzowski, Senior Planner for the City of Eugene, is two-fold. First, it provides some minimal data regarding the community at a particular time and place in its history. Secondly, it concludes that the combination of racial identity, lack of employment, and lack of housing were a greater problem for this community than for the general Eugene population. In a sense, it identifies these residents as a cohesive, marginalized, socioeconomic group.

*SIXTY YEARS OF YESTERDAYS*⁶⁶

Opal Ruth Clark, the wife of a former University of Oregon Dean, shares her memories of living in Eugene throughout the last half of the 20th Century. One chapter details her work as Chair of the League of Women Voters' Committee on Minority Problems in Eugene. She was also a member of a larger local group: the Lane County Council for Civic Unity. She explains the growth of Eugene's African-American community as follows: "After the close of the war industries in Portland, several Black (then called Negro or Colored) families moved to Eugene to find work and housing. Up to that time only two Negro men, both of them employed at the Southern Pacific Railroad station, lived in Eugene with their families."⁶⁷ Clark claimed that the two biggest problems for the black community in the 1940s included: "the limited resources of the Blacks and the resistance of the Whites to the integration of the Blacks into their

⁶⁶ Opal Ruth Clark, *Sixty Years of Yesterdays* (Eugene, OR: self published, 1991).

⁶⁷ Clark, *Sixty Years*, 29.

neighborhoods. The deep seated prejudice extended to the refusal to give service to Blacks in hotels and restaurants.”⁶⁸ At the time of the Ferry Street eviction, Clark explains, a realtor on the Civic Unity Board knew of a lot three miles west of town that could be had so inexpensively that he could build a road and sell housing lots for \$300. “Twelve families were able to buy a lot on which, since it was outside the city limits and free from zoning restrictions, they could build whatever housing they could afford.”⁶⁹ This was how the 11th Avenue location was chosen for the relocation of many of the Ferry Street families. The chapter describes an air of pervasive racism in Eugene during the 1950s, and summarizes actions on the part of the Lane County Fellowship for Civic Unity to integrate the city.

THE OAKLEY GLENN REPORT⁷⁰

In 1963, just after he was made Captain of the Eugene Police Department, Oakley Glenn was asked to chair the Lane County Fellowship for Civic Unity, an organization specifically created to help eliminate racial disparities within Eugene. In 1985, he prepared an untitled report that traces the history of Eugene’s African-American community from its settlement in the Ferry Street Bridge area through the turbulent 1960s and into the 1980s, amassing employment and housing data on original Ferry Street Bridge settlers and others from Eugene’s African-American community. While this

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Oakley V. Glenn, Untitled history of minorities in Eugene and the establishment of the local Advisory Commission on Human Rights, c.1985.

report provides a unique sense of continuity for the community, Glenn's report has offended some former residents who dispute his survey findings and his account of the establishment of the Ferry Street Bridge community. Ken Guzowski, Senior Planner with the City of Eugene, provided a copy of this report, which has formed the basis of numerous subsequent records—a fact that irritates former residents.

EUGENE AREA CONTEXT STATEMENT⁷¹

In Chapter Seven of this context statement, prepared by local preservationists Elizabeth Carter and Michelle Dennis for the City of Eugene, a section is devoted to the arrival of African-Americans and their settlement at the foot of the Ferry Street Bridge. This report provided the names of founding families: the Mims and Reynolds families. Currently, members of these two families are the last living local authorities on life within this short-lived community. Chapter Seven briefly details the founding of the Ferry Street village: “It continued to expand until as many as fifty persons resided in the sub-standard tent village. Although a few of the newcomers were able to purchase or rent houses in town, most lived in the Ferry Street bridge ‘village’ because few white residents would rent to black families.”⁷² This report touches on one of the points of contention amongst former residents: While Reynolds family members dispute the “Tent City”

⁷¹ Elizabeth Carter and Michelle Dennis, “Eugene Area Context Statement” (Eugene, OR: Eugene Planning and Development, 1996), www.eugene-or.gov/portal/server.pt?open=17&objID=10074&DirMode=1&parentname=Dir&parentid=1&mode=2&in_hi_userid=2&cached=true [Accessed last on May 16, 2009].

⁷² Carter and Dennis, *Eugene Area Context Statement*, Chapter 7, 2.

nickname by saying there were no tents on the land, only wood-framed homes, Willie Mims remembers that his own home and the home of his best friend both sported tent roofs over plank walls.

EUGENE MODERNISM CONTEXT 1935-1965⁷³

One of the most detailed public documents related to the evolution of the Ferry Street Bridge community, the Eugene Modernism context statement devotes a chapter to the history of various cultural groups, including African-Americans, throughout the World War II era. It closely tracks Eugene's first established African-American families: the Mims', Reynolds' and Washingtons. Though the statement covers the founding of the Ferry Street Bridge community, as well as the establishment of certain families within the city limits, it cites few sources for its historic material. It is, therefore, difficult to confirm certain details, including the histories of families no longer living.

WILLAKENZIE AREA PLAN, HISTORIC CONTEXT⁷⁴

One more report provided some context for the foundation of the Ferry Street Bridge community. "Willakenzie" is the name given to the area north of the Willamette River and south of the McKenzie River. Its western boundary is the south-flowing stretch

⁷³ Sally Wright and David Pinyerd, *Eugene Modernism 1935-1965*. (Eugene, OR: Eugene Planning and Development, 2003), www.ci.eugene.or.us/pdd/Planning/eugenehistoric/eugenemodernism/10%20cultural.pdf [Accessed last May 16, 2009].

⁷⁴ Maura Johnson in conjunction with the Eugene Planning Division, *Willakenzie Area Plan Historic Context* (Eugene, OR, August 1989).

of the Willamette River, before it bends to the east, and the Eastern boundary is Interstate 5. This area was annexed to the city piecemeal from 1960 on. While the Ferry Street families were living in the southern portion of the Willakenzie area along the north bank of the Willamette River, this area was still unincorporated county land. However, it was very close to downtown Eugene, which might have been its initial appeal.

Though the report focuses on the growth and evolution of the farmlands in this area, it also mentions urban growth, which is considered a potential factor in the demolition and reclamation of the lands from the Ferry Street community for the expansion of the bridge. As the report states, “The area of greatest loss [of historic resources] is in the vicinity of Coburg Road just north of the river.”⁷⁵ (Ferry Street becomes Coburg Road on the north side of the river.) The report includes one more interesting detail: a photograph ca. 1949 of children, black and white, huddled around a water pump. Currently, this photo provides the most detailed images of buildings on the Ferry Street site. It was published along with a caption: “Children of migrant workers gathering at water pump at the Ferry Street Bridge settlement outside of Eugene.” The caption and the photo were accessed from the Oregon Historical Society files. While the Oregon Historical Society was able to provide no extra information regarding this photo and could not confirm anything about its provenance, the caption, published in quotation marks, suggests that the site was already known to be a laborers’ camp, or that such a camp existed nearby before African-Americans arrived.

⁷⁵ Johnson, *Willakenzie Historic Context*, 33.

The report further reads: “The issue of migrant farm labor also warrants further study. Most written material regarding farm harvesting focuses on the contribution of local laborers. Thus far, no written documentation of migrant workers, or the workers’ camps reputedly located in the Ferry Street Bridge area, has been located.”⁷⁶

While the report and document fail to identify the children in the photo, they were recognizable to the oldest residents of the Ferry Street village as the Johnson children. Interestingly, the white children in the photo were unidentifiable.⁷⁷

“BLACK MAN IN WHITE TOWN,” *PACIFIC NORTHWEST QUARTERLY*⁷⁸

Thomas Hogg’s article *Black Man in White Town*, argues that the founders of Eugene’s black community had grown complacent by the 1970s. Former Ferry Street families were happy to have improved their living conditions and moved out of Ferry Street, says Hogg, and the next generation, joined by newcomers with more education and strong ties to the university, was responsible for raising awareness of racial disparities. “The latent function of the university as a focal point for Black Power diatribes, rallies, and the nearly continuous generation of issues is rapidly politically socializing a wider spectrum of the Eugene black community and is concomitantly contributing to a clear drawing of the racial line.”⁷⁹ Hogg’s article traces the community

⁷⁶ Johnson, *Willakenzie Historic Context*, 41.

⁷⁷ Mattie Reynolds, interviewed by the author and folklorist John Fenn, with assistance by Lyllye Parker and Lois Reynolds, Eugene, OR, May 2, 2009.

⁷⁸ Thomas C. Hogg, “Black Man in White Town,” in *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, January 1972, 14 – 21.

⁷⁹ Hogg, “Black Man in White Town,” 21.

from its Ferry Street Bridge roots, notes the social distance between white and black residents, refers to the social cohesion of the black community as “intense sociability,” and even provides crime figures and a rather lurid picture of life in the Coburg Road area, one of the three settlement areas that grew out of the dissolution of Eugene’s Ferry Street Bridge community.

However, like many researchers, Hogg ties the end of that community to a date in 1948, which is a point of disagreement amongst former residents. Willie Mims, who lived in the Ferry Street community as a boy, remembers that his family moved from Ferry Street to a house on High Street, within the city boundaries, in 1948. The Reynolds family, however, remembers moving in the summer of 1949, which is when the court order for eviction was released. While it is possible that these two families were subjected to different rules, or that the Mims family had the opportunity to move before the eviction order, the discrepancy exists in the earliest records, including the League of Women Voters’ Report, which claims that “When, in March 1948, Negroes were forced to vacate this property, 65 citizens met in protest at the County Court House.”⁸⁰ So far, no evidence of such a protest can be found, either in the county records or in newspaper reports. However, had the site been vacated in 1948, the order of 1949 would have been unnecessary. The county order of evacuation, mentioned previously, is the best evidence, along with newspaper reports, of the evictions taking place in the summer of 1949.

⁸⁰ League of Women Voters of Lane County, “The Negro in Eugene,” (Eugene, Or, 1952) 3.

*BRIDGING THE RIVER: A HISTORY OF HOUSING DISCRIMINATION IN EUGENE, OREGON*⁸¹

Andrew Neary's excellent paper regarding discrimination against African-Americans begins with a succinct history of Oregon's infamous exclusion law:

In 1844 the Oregon country's first exclusion law was passed, preventing free blacks from settling in the territory. This law was dubbed the "Lash Law" since it encouraged the whipping of blacks every six months until they left the territory. Although this law was repealed a year later, it was replaced by another exclusion law in 1849, and in 1859 Oregon became the only state admitted to the union whose constitution had an exclusion law. This exclusion law was not rigidly enforced yet it loomed like a phantom, along with a law preventing blacks from voting, in Oregon's bill of rights until their removal in 1926 and 1927 respectively.

Neary's work focuses on the evolution of the Ferry Street community, identifying a number of themes through quotes from former Ferry Street residents Willie C. Mims and Lyllye Parker, as well as a former black student of the University of Oregon, DeNorval Unthank, that appear throughout the scholarship. Neary notes the isolation of the Ferry Street site, the cultural cohesion of its black residents, the pleasurable pastimes of the Ferry Street children, and the great hardships suffered due to discrimination in housing policy. Neary, like many historians and local scholars, assumed that urban renewal was at the root of the community's relocation, a claim that is examined and ultimately discarded in later chapters of this study. However, urban renewal projects, which displaced numerous cohesive black communities around the nation in the mid-20th century, bear striking resemblance to the project that displaced the Ferry Street community—a bridge reconstruction project.

⁸¹ Andrew Neary, *Bridging the River: A History of Housing Discrimination in Eugene*, (University of Oregon Environmental History Project, March 16, 2006).

*EUGENE 1945 – 2000: DECISIONS THAT MADE A COMMUNITY*⁸²

Two essays in this collection published by the City Club of Eugene treat the history of Eugene’s racism. The first, “Dealing with Race,” begins with harsh words: “The history of race relations in Eugene is one of discrimination and harassment, of relocation and displacement, of marginalization and invisibility.”⁸³ The essay traces the history of Ferry Street and the relocation of its families. It also provides evidence that exclusionary housing covenants were still grandfathered into deeds as late as the 1990s. “One such reference was recorded in Lane County Records on November 16, 1946, and stated: ‘No persons other than those of the Caucasian Race shall own, use, lease, occupy... portion of said premises, providing that this restriction shall not prevent occupancy by domestic servants of a different race employed by an owner...’”⁸⁴ The essay goes on to examine the history of racism against other ethnic groups. A second essay, “Communities Within: Stories from Eugene’s Communities of Color” traces Eugene’s multicultural history and dwells on the fact that the Ferry Street families are now the bedrock of Eugene’s black community. The author identifies Bertha and Charley Johnson as one of the first African-American families to arrive in Eugene in the 1940s. They stayed with Leo and Pearl Mae Washington when they arrived. These two

⁸² City Club of Eugene, ed., *Eugene 1945-2000: Decisions that Made a Community*, (Eugene, OR: City Club of Eugene, 2000).

⁸³ Peggy Nagae, “Dealing with Race,” *Eugene 1945-2000: Decisions that Made a Community*, (Eugene, OR: City Club of Eugene, 2000), 199.

⁸⁴ Nagae, “Race,” 201.

African-American families may represent the first of the expanding community. The essay includes quotes from prominent black Eugeniens and claims that they still struggle to find a cohesive community in a city that demolished the location of the original African-American social circle, the Ferry Street “village.”

“THE ROLE OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT IN OREGON”⁸⁵

Stephanie Vitus prepared a history of civil rights in Oregon that focused closely on the evolution of the Ferry Street village. Though Vitus tells the familiar story of the neighborhood’s growth and demolition, she relates it to the evolution of race relations in Oregon, providing a context-rich analysis that reminds us that history is an ever evolving narrative, and that the events that occurred at Ferry Street fed into a narrative of social life for Eugene’s black community that continued to shape its cultural identity and the cultural identity of other black communities in Oregon.

CENSUS DATA⁸⁶

A look at Oregon’s evolution through census records shows how rarely black families located in Eugene and in Oregon as a whole during the early part of the 20th century. Oregon’s total population rose from 1,089,584 in 1940 to 1,521,341 in 1950. Of those, the 1940 census identified a “Negro” population of only 2,565. This equals 331 more African-Americans than were recorded in the 1930 Oregon census. However, by

⁸⁵ Stephanie Vitus, *The Role of the Civil Rights Movement in Oregon*, (University of Oregon class paper), 2003.

⁸⁶ Sixteenth Census of the United States: 1940, Population Volume II, Part 5: New York-Oregon [Accessed February 12, 2009].

1950, the African-American population had grown to 11,529 individuals. These numbers reflect a western migration by families who hoped to receive work in Oregon's booming timber industry during the war.

A snapshot of Lane County confirms that Ferry Street was the first community of families in or around Eugene. Eugene's total population rose from 69,096 residents in 1940 to 125,776 in 1950. In 1940, only 15 African-Americans were recorded. That was one fewer than in the 1930 census. By 1950, the African-American population had risen to 253.

As a city, Eugene recorded a total of 20,838 residents in 1940, seven of which were African-American. This total equals two more than lived in Eugene in 1930. By 1950, Eugene's population had risen to 35,879 and 55 of these residents were African-American.

These numbers point to a general acceleration in migration to Oregon between 1940 and 1950. In Eugene, the black population grew to almost eight times its size, from seven to 55 individuals, in ten years. However, in 1950, they still equaled only .15 percent of the general population of the city.

The League of Women Voters survey from 1952 recorded a total "Negro" population of 110 living within the combined Springfield-Eugene area. The report claims that: "A count made two months ago reported about 160, but since then a number of families have moved away."⁸⁷ It is possible that race relations or other social issues may have played into the decision to leave Eugene.

⁸⁷ LWV, "Negro in Eugene," 2.

AERIAL PHOTOS AND SANBORN MAPS

While historic maps and aerials from the 1940s and 50s have been useful in identifying the rough outlines of the former Ferry Street village, they lack significant detail. The Sanborn maps include a small section of the land north of the Willamette River, but do not locate any buildings in the Ferry Street Bridge area. This section of county land was not surveyed because it was outside the city boundaries.

Aerial photos have been discovered in the University of Oregon's Knight Library and in the Lane County Surveyor's Office. While Lane County had archived no photos from the era of significance, a photo from 1952 clearly shows the recently constructed new Ferry Street Bridge. A photo from a similar angle dated May 12, 1969 shows a fundamentally altered set of roads and approaches to the bridge, clearly showing how difficult it would be for former Ferry Street residents to recognize roadways as landmarks from the 1940s.

Aerial photos from the University of Oregon's collection dated from the period between 1948 and 1952. The photos themselves are undated, but they do provide a record of the area around the bridge. Though it is difficult to recognize any of the structures related to the Ferry Street community, even under a magnifying glass, other elements of the landscape are clearly readable.

A detail of the earlier Ferry Street Bridge and the surrounding landscape are included in Figure 3.4 below.



Figure 3.4: The Ferry Street Bridge Before Redevelopment

This detail of an undated aerial photo of the Ferry Street Bridge circa 1950 shows structures and uses on the land just north of the river, but does not provide enough detail to identify specific structures. However, it does identify the approach to the bridge and the relationship of the site to the riverbank and to the surrounding Willakenzie area. It is possible to distinguish the unimproved roads that Willie Mims refers to in interviews (excerpted below), as well as the site's proximity to the riverbank and to the city of Eugene to the south. The northern section of the city is visible in the bottom left edge of the photo.

“SQUATTERS PHOTOS OCT. 14, 1970”

While searching county records for relevant historic data related to the Ferry Street site, a planner brought out a file labeled “Squatters photos Oct. 14, 1970.” In the file were eight photos of small, one and/or two-room ad hoc dwellings, wood-framed with flat or shallowly pitched gable or shed roofs and single-light windows. Though very simple structures, these dwellings were neat and were surrounded by usable outdoor spaces including shelters for supplies, one or two chairs and a table, along with a curved walkway that appeared to be raked or graveled to provide a neat, circular path to the front door of one of the buildings (See Figure 3.5).

The planner had no further information related to these photos nor were there any associated documents. None of Ferry Street’s former residents recognized the buildings, but the researcher finds it interesting that another section, or perhaps the same section, of Alton Baker Park hosted at least one other temporary dwelling, indicating the cultural persistence of impermanent housing on the site, perhaps because of the easy access to fresh

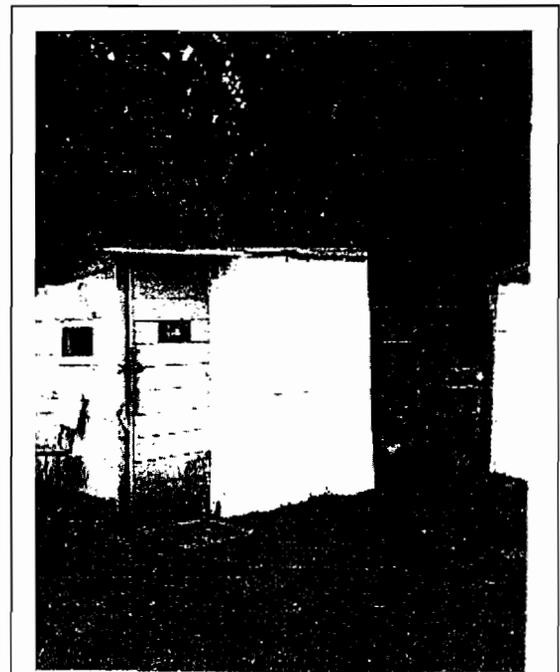


Figure 3.5: “Squatters,” 1970
These grainy photos from October 1970, supplied by the Lane County Surveyor’s office, show simple buildings, a curved walkway to one of the front entrances, usable outdoor spaces, and framed windows.

water and the site's close proximity to Eugene. Though these photos, which were simple snapshots, cannot tell us anything about the original Ferry Street structures, they do provide a model of simple, utilitarian housing placed on the publicly owned site of Alton Baker Park.

NEWSPAPERS

Along with public histories and city-funded reports, the historical record regarding the Ferry Street Bridge community relies heavily on reports from two papers of record: *The Eugene Register-Guard* and *The Oregonian*. Though indexes are imperfect guides to newspaper stories, they do provide an entry point into local coverage. The Knight Library at the University of Oregon campus maintains sparse indexes that include phrases like "Ferry Street Bridge" and some reference to ethnic groups. For future researchers, it is important to recognize that terminology has changed. While contemporary researchers may rely on words like "African-American" or "black," these phrases have short historic lives. Phrases that have gone out of favor, like "Negro" and "colored" are common in newspaper reports and other documentation in the mid-20th century. It is also necessary to recognize that the indexes are incomplete records. For a complete record of all newspaper stories related to the evolution of Eugene's black community, one would have to scan each individual newspaper on microfilm. Some of the most relevant articles in this list were not listed in the index but were discovered through the meticulous scanning of microfilm around key dates in 1949, 1950 and 1952.

While *The Oregonian* and the *Eugene Register-Guard* were the two most complete sources for news accounts, media sources that might yet yield important information include the University of Oregon's newspaper, the *Oregon Daily Emerald*.

THE OREGONIAN

The Oregonian, a daily newspaper published in Portland, did not always carry news related to Eugene. However, they are credited within the community for covering the difficult living conditions that Eugene's African-Americans were subjected to in the 1950s. In the following suite of articles, which focus on life for the African-American community post-Ferry Street, note that *The Oregonian* was willing to publish numerous photographs of life within Eugene's African-American community and to produce, without condescension or passion, a record of life under difficult circumstances. The paper was also willing to publish incendiary statements that criticized the local community for its unfair treatment of its black citizens.

2/10/52: "Racial Problem Strikes Eugene"⁸⁸

A photograph shows two of the Reynolds children carrying a milk jug between them. The caption reads, "Negroes living on the Amazon Creek flat along 11th street west of Eugene have no water supply, and probably never will have in present area. So they truck water from town in cans, carry it by hand to their homes. Baths are at a premium this way. Shown are Robert and Lois Reynolds with container."

⁸⁸ Hugh Scott, "Racial Problem Strikes Eugene," *The Oregonian*, February 10, 1952.

This is one of the first articles to examine the issues of resettlement for former members of the Ferry Street Bridge area. The February 10, 1952 article explains the impetus for settlement in Eugene:

Right after the war, a number of Negroes who had come to west coast states to work in shipyards and other war industries gravitated to Eugene, drawn by activity in sawmills and government damn construction. Several Negro families 'squatted' on county property in an area slated to be occupied by the east approach of the new Ferry Street Bridge over the Willamette River in Eugene. When the county prepared to build the bridge, the Negro families received notice to vacate the property. That was given in March 1948. They were given six months in which to find new quarters.

From this record, it appears that the 1949 order of eviction may have resulted from an earlier notice. If so, the earlier notice is not among the retained county orders.

The story goes on to include pictures and anecdotes related to the difficult circumstances faced at the West 11th Avenue site, including flooding, lack of running water and indoor plumbing, clay that trapped puddles under the homes for months, and high prices for rent and for land—including \$2,000 paid by the church conference for the lots used to build Eugene's oldest African-American church, St. Mark's Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, which still stands on the site, though all the original surrounding houses are gone, according to Mattie Reynolds (See Figure 3.6 below).⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Mattie Reynolds, personal interview, May 2, 2009.

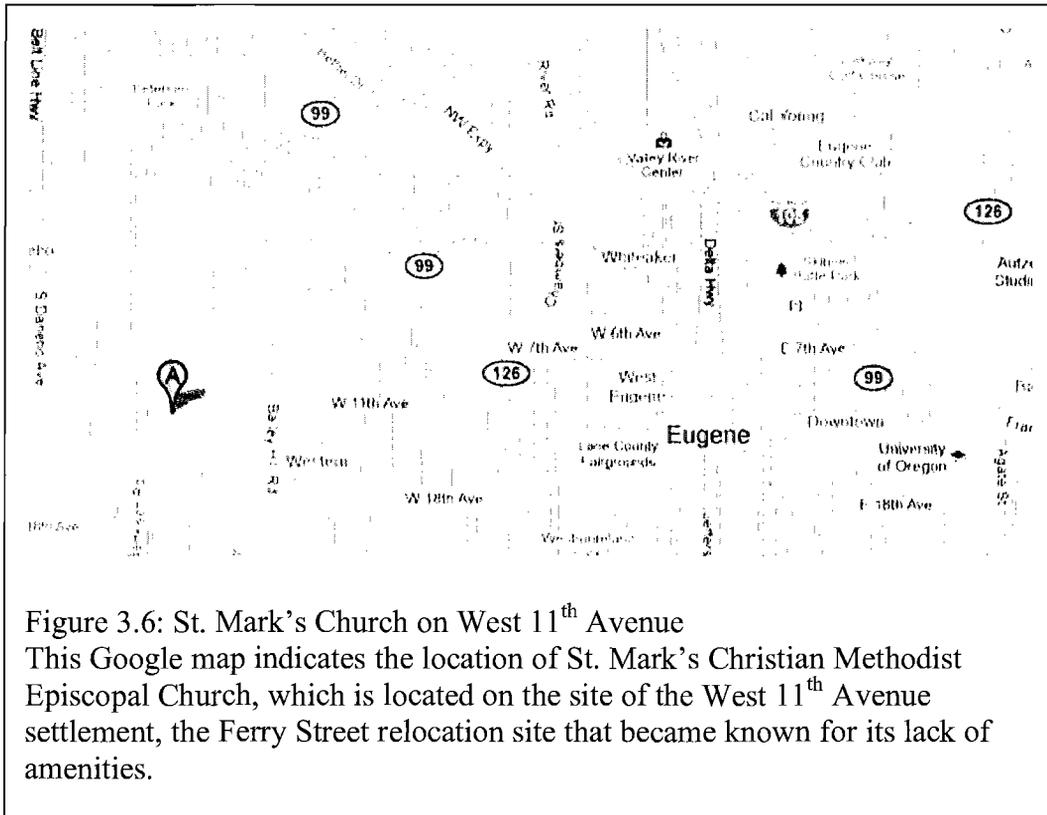


Figure 3.6: St. Mark's Church on West 11th Avenue

This Google map indicates the location of St. Mark's Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, which is located on the site of the West 11th Avenue settlement, the Ferry Street relocation site that became known for its lack of amenities.

Though images of homes are difficult to find anywhere in the historic record, there are, in the background of these photos, one or two-room, wood-framed, shed and gable roofed buildings that may be similar to those once found at Ferry Street, as these would have been constructed no more than five years after the construction of the Ferry Street homes. Though we cannot say much about them, they appear to include off-center doors and no windows on the entry side (See Figure 3.7 below).



Figure 3.7: West 11th Avenue Housing
 In this *Oregonian* photo, children stand at the edge of Amazon Creek. These are some of the only images of early, local African-American houses.

2/11/52: “Eugene Citizens Begin to Seek Means of Helping Negroes”⁹⁰

Supplemented by photos of white advocates and black women inside homes and trailers, this article discusses the efforts of the League of Women Voters, who tried to advocate for the families that had been moved to the West 11th settlement. The West 11th settlement became an important stepping stone for families who had been displaced at least once and were moved to a site nearly as dangerous and just as remote as their

⁹⁰ Hugh Scott, “Eugene Citizens Begin to Seek Means of Helping Negroes,” *The Oregonian*, February 11, 1952.

previous location. According to the February 11, 1952 article, “One thing is agreed: it was a ghastly mistake to settle a dozen Negro families along W. 11th Street, where they can never have water or sewer service. Some solution must be found for the problem.”

The article also notes that Eugene was preparing a public discussion to address the issues associated with the settlement and with racism. A representative of the Urban League of Portland was slated to address commonly held misperceptions among white Eugeniens, including racist beliefs regarding the culture and character of African-Americans and the impact black residents had on property values. The article leaves no doubt that racism and general ignorance were prevalent. As the article states, “Such misconceptions are widely held in Eugene. There just hasn’t been enough contact between Negroes and whites to dispel them.”

2/13/52: “Eugene Group Takes Steps For Racial Relations Council”⁹¹

This article reports on the 400-person discussion held in Eugene on February 12, 1952. The panel addressed stereotypes and discussed the future of housing and employment for Eugene’s black community. The article reports: “The crowd unanimously approved a move to have a smaller group of volunteer citizens formed as a permanent inter-racial relations council.”

⁹¹ Al Currey, “Eugene Group Takes Steps For Race Relations Council” in *The Oregonian*, February 13, 1952.

2/27/52: “16 to Devise Racial Policy”⁹²

This article details the formation of a steering committee made up of ten white and six black Eugenians tasked with forming a “local council on ‘intercultural relations.’” This was clearly an early and important step in a local partnership to improve race relations and quality of life issues for local black residents.

The index to *The Oregonian* did not include other mentions of Eugene’s African-American community. It is possible that these newspaper reports included some of the first photographs and details related to Eugene’s isolated African-American community. As such, newspaper coverage might have helped introduce white Eugene to its black neighbors and to begin to break down impenetrable, if intangible, barriers. It also appears to have impacted the local newspaper, the *Eugene Register-Guard*, which changed the tone of its reportage around the same time.

THE EUGENE REGISTER-GUARD:

The coverage of the Eugene Register-Guard goes through a striking evolution between 1949 and 1952. Within those years, the coverage of the Ferry Street community was sympathetic, but included few intimate portraits of black Eugenians, and often focused on white residents when they were available. The coverage of the evacuation of Ferry Street was more sympathetic to white families who had just arrived in Eugene, for instance, than to black families like the Reynolds who lost their three-bedroom home due

⁹² Staff, “16 to Devise Racial Policy,” in *The Oregonian*, publication date unknown.

to the evacuation. The first suite of articles, detailed below, was published right before the final evacuation was ordered in 1949. Note that the only story related to the Ferry Street villagers before the evacuation notice is the story of triplets being born to a poor African-American couple, the Johnsons.

Date Unknown: “Judge Hurd Gets his Bridge”⁹³

This editorial details the construction of the new Ferry Street Bridge and gives credit to “County Judge Hurd” for seeing the need for the bridge in 1939 (before the site was settled by Eugene’s African-American population). Hurd is also credited with guiding the county to buy right-of-ways in anticipation. In appreciation, the *Register-Guard*’s editorial team recommended naming the bridge after Hurd, rather than the “new Ferry Street Bridge,” as had become convenient.

7/12/49: Ferry Street Mother Bears Three Boys⁹⁴

This is one of the earliest articles to acknowledge the community living north of the bridge. It includes a picture of Charles Johnson tightly wedged between a white nurse and a white doctor, each one holding one of the newborn triplets. The story describes the family’s concerns over raising seven children on Charles’s part time salary from the Eugene Chemical Works on Patterson Road. The story is sympathetic to the Johnson family but does not report broadly on the surrounding community.

⁹³ Editorial Staff, “Judge Hurd Gets His Bridge,” in *The Eugene Register-Guard*, courtesy of the Lane County Historical Society, publication date unknown.

⁹⁴ Herb Baker, “Ferry Street Mother Bears Three Boys,” *The Eugene Register-Guard*, July 12, 1949.

7/14/49: County Court Tells Ferry St. Villagers to Start Moving⁹⁵

Two days after the story regarding the Johnson family's new triplet, this article reports on the Lane County Court's order to vacate the property for the rebuilding of the Ferry Street Bridge. The report claims that residents have ten days to vacate or they will be evicted: "The court order was no surprise to the residents who had been told last spring that July 1 was the absolute deadline for them to move off the land." The article says there are 101 people living on the site, 65 of which are "colored" and 36 of which are white. The article interviews a section of the populace, including Mrs. Nettle, who says that they have property on West 11th and a building frame, but no roof, no floor and no doors. Two white families are named: Mrs. Robert Barber who "answered the call at another shack" and Mrs. Mavis Walker who claimed, "We're white and broke but there is no shame to be broke. We've been here two years and you can say definitely there is no place to rent at reasonable prices." The story also mentions two G.I.s living in a tent near the river preparing to attend school. Finally, the Owens family is called the "most pathetic." The white family's parents sleep on the ground while their three children sleep in the family's Studebaker.

⁹⁵ Staff, "County Court Tells Ferry St. Villagers to Start Moving," *The Eugene Register-Guard*, July 14, 1949.

Ca. July 1949: Committee Reports on Ferry Streeters⁹⁶

The Citizens Committee for Relocating Ferry Street Settlers claim that five of the nine African-American families at Ferry Street had found other housing options. The majority had moved to West 11th, where they had purchased land. “There is a serious water problem out there,” according to a committee member. The report notes that the court order limits eviction to those buildings south of Day Island Road, which excludes most of the Ferry Street homes. However, Sheriff C. A. Swartz is quoted as saying “I don’t care what the name of the street is... All them people got to go.” The sheriff further states that the eviction isn’t a “race problem. Lots of those people are white. It’s just a matter of the bridge. Period.” Interestingly, even this quote is disputed. It is also attributed to County Commissioner Lee Raish. (See “Black Island in a Sea of White,” page 63.) However, Sheriff Swartz was right that many of the displaced were white—approximately one third.

8/13/49: A sketch of the new Ferry Street Bridge includes a caption noting that it should be completed in 1950. The caption also notes that the sketch was developed from aerial photos and architectural drawings. However, there is no evidence of the village in the sketch, and long-time Eugene residents suggest that most photographs or sketches would have likely avoided focusing on the riverbank community—whether to protect their privacy or ignore their existence is unclear.

⁹⁶ Bob Frazier, “Committee Reports on Ferry Streeters,” *The Eugene Register-Guard*, undated.

After these articles were published, there was very little coverage of Eugene's African-American community for a couple years. However, in 1952, a flattering portrait of a local good Samaritan who helped the black citizens in town was published. And soon after that, February 10, 1952, *The Oregonian* published its first story describing life for the families who had moved from Ferry Street to the muddy site on West 11th Ave. As the community began to take a new look at the conditions in which its African-Americans were living, an editorial was released that set a new tone for the *Eugene Register-Guard*. The paper's folksy quotes and colorful portraits of African-Americans were replaced with a somber and respectful call to eradicate inequalities in housing and jobs.

Ca. 1852: "Mrs. Boals Plays Good Samaritan to Eugene's Negro Folk"⁹⁷

The *Register-Guard's* society editor profiles a white resident who befriended African-American families living on West 11th. A member of the "Fellowship for Civic Unity," Boals donated clothing, encouraged the men to learn trades, trained the women and girls in housekeeping and was an advocate in court and when African-Americans had to request social security or veterans benefits "after the death of a wage-earner." Boals was said to be greatly admired for her tireless work with the community, but the community was oddly absent from the report. A single quote appeared and was attributed to "the Negro families" and not to any specific speaker: "There won't ever be another

⁹⁷ Ann Connell, "Mrs. Boals Plays Good Samaritan to Eugene's Negro Folk," in *The Eugene Register-Guard*, courtesy of the Lane County Historical Society, circa April 1952. Boals is identified as Mrs. Ray B. Boals of Yachats, recently of Eugene.

like her... We can't hardly name the things she's done, 'cause she's done so many things, so much!"

While the story is clearly written to honor a generous resident, the African-American community is painted as needy and incapable of acting without Mrs. Boals' guidance.

2/19/52: "Tuesday Forum Big Event for Local Negro Families"⁹⁸

For this condescending but intimate portrait, the reporter spent time in the Reynolds household, listening to the family discuss an upcoming community meeting that would attempt to dispel prejudice and find solutions for the poor living conditions on West 11th Avenue. Sam Reynolds is pictured with a portrait of Abraham Lincoln, and the story details everything from his income (\$3800 a year, before taxes) to the family's expenses, their lack of running water, their injuries and illnesses. It also provides updates on things like the price of land on West 11th ("Home is a house whose 2 x 4 foundation is sunk in the mud and which Sam Reynolds and family are buying for \$3500. The terms started out easy. 'Just pay \$25 down and it's yours,' the family recalls."), and the difficulty of housing and feeding seven children on one man's income.

As with the tribute to Mrs. Boals, this article is an example of how dialogue and a folksy tone are used to characterize the community and the family. The reporter addresses the difficulty of poverty and poor living conditions at the West 11th site, but his portrait of

⁹⁸ Harlow Schillios, "Tuesday Forum Big Event for Local Negro Families," *The Eugene Register-Guard*, February 19, 1952.

the Reynolds family is also full of quotes like “YASSUH! Mister Abe was quite a man,” which was attributed to Sam Reynolds.

2/19/52: “Editorial: On the Evening of Lincoln’s Birthday”⁹⁹

With the theme of emancipation in the background and with the public’s first meeting regarding racial inequality on the horizon, the editors of the *Register-Guard* claimed that it was time for Eugene to acknowledge its own specific “Negro problem,” which “includes not only the difficulties of decent housing but decent jobs for Negro people, according to their abilities.” The editorial claimed that Eugene had opposed the housing of black Eugenians in its white neighborhoods and that the country, as a whole, had failed to meet the promise of egalitarianism written into the Constitution with the 13th and 14th amendments. On the eve of Lincoln’s birthday, according to the editors, Eugenians needed to address these problems as a cohesive community.

This editorial seems to mark a change in tone for the *Register-Guard*. The paper would continue to advocate for racial equality in future decades and to approach racism more directly as the African-American community grew throughout the 1950s and 1960s. During this heady era, Eugene formed the Congress on Racial Equality and attracted a number of Black Panthers from California. By the mid-1960s, the editorial voice of the paper with regard to race had changed utterly. In the following articles, related specifically to housing struggles in Eugene, racism, when overt, was news worthy. Race,

⁹⁹ Editorial staff, “Editorial: On the Evening of Lincoln’s Birthday,” *The Eugene Register-Guard*, February 19, 1952.

which had been a subtext, an elusive cultural signifier, in previous articles, had by now become an openly debated political issue, and not just in Eugene but on the national stage as part of President Johnson's national civil rights agenda.

Ca. 1964: Discrimination Claim Here Under Scrutiny¹⁰⁰

This report explains how twenty-five protestors showed up to picket a house in support of a "Negro" mother and six children who were denied the right to rent it. The article claims that the complaint was under investigation by the Civil Rights Division of the State Bureau of Labor.

5/25/64: "Pickets from C.O.R.E. March In Front of Eugene Dwelling"¹⁰¹

By 1964, the Eugene chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was advocating for fairness in rental practices. This article claims that a local woman chose not to rent her three-bedroom home to an African-American couple. Members of CORE said they would rather not picket, but they could not accept housing discrimination anymore. The owner of the house on Monroe Street in the Whitaker neighborhood claimed she was not motivated by color but by the decision to sell rather than rent the house. The reporter questioned her neighbors and determined that some of them were still audibly opposed to having African-American neighbors.

¹⁰⁰ Unnamed author, "Discrimination Claim Here Under Scrutiny," *The Eugene Register-Guard*, 1964.

¹⁰¹ Marvin Tims, "Pickets from C.O.R.E. March In Front of Eugene Dwelling," *The Eugene Register-Guard*, May 25, 1965.

5/28/64: “Negro Pair Has ‘Til Friday To Rent Monroe St. House”¹⁰²

This article details how CORE, with the help of the Civil Rights Division of the Oregon Bureau of Labor, negotiated with Mrs. Tubbs to give Mr. and Mrs. Alvin Stubbs the right to rent her house on Monroe Street. Representatives of C.O.R.E. were involved in a half-dozen such cases, said the report, and were beginning to investigate realty practices.

Though this case does not directly address the Ferry Street Bridge community, it further emphasizes the tenacity of discriminatory practices in Eugene and provides clues to how such practices were eventually eradicated through regulation, law and partnerships between community groups, the government and the media.

09/25/68: “Rights Probe Ordered of Housing Authority”¹⁰³

Housing continued to be a challenge for African-Americans in Eugene long after Ferry Street was razed. This article states that as late as 1968, Eugene’s African-American population found it necessary to argue for an investigation to explain the exclusion of African-Americans and low-income residents on executive boards and on the staff of the Lane County Housing Authority.

¹⁰² Staff, “Negro Pair Has ‘Til Friday To Rent Monroe St. House,” in *The Eugene Register-Guard*, May 28, 1964.

¹⁰³ Ed Kenyan, “Rights Probe Ordered of Housing Authority,” in *The Eugene Register-Guard*, September 25, 1968.

From coverage of housing discrimination in Eugene, the *Register-Guard's* editorial voice took yet another turn, and the intimate portrait of life in a primarily white town returned. However, the subjects of these pieces were no longer the white good Samaritans or the unnamed black citizens living on the outskirts of town. There was no longer a leering sense of curiosity about their lives. Now, African-Americans were the central characters in stories. They were named, interviewed, and quoted equally. However, race remained central in these articles, as if the goal were to identify for the rest of Eugene exactly what it was like to be black. These stories were followed by the final phase of the *Guard's* coverage, which has continued into the 21st Century. If race is mentioned in a story now, it is usually in a story regarding public commemoration. Eugene's elder African-Americans have been recognized since the 1970s for having seen and experienced a cultural shift in race relations. Though racism has not been eradicated, and stories of racial tension continue to appear in the daily newspaper, the *Register-Guard* has taken multiple opportunities to cover the city's regular commemorative efforts.

10/12/75: "What It's Like to be Black in Eugene"

This retrospective article examines generations of Eugene's black community, beginning with Wiley Griffin, by now an iconic figure of early Eugene. Griffin, one of the very few African-Americans photographed in 19th-century Eugene, is shown driving a mule cart as part of the Eugene and College Hill Street Railway, "the city's first street car line," in 1895. This article follows the evolution of Eugene's black community and

quotes students and professionals in town who claim that racism, while subtle, still made life difficult during the 1970s. The community was still very small in number, and Oregon had a long history with white supremacy movements like the Ku Klux Klan.¹⁰⁴ With reference to the dissolution of communities like Ferry Street, one quote in this 1975 article is particularly instructive:

Ironically, the absence of a black section in Eugene looks at first glance like successful integration. Actually, it merely weakens the black foothold in the community. ‘There is no black community, as such,’ says Jay Bolton, a black employment counselor and disk jockey on KLCC radio. ‘Few black businesses have opened in Eugene—fewer still have stayed open. There is no predominantly black residential area and since the small black population never gathers in one place, its political power, visibility and sense of community are eroded.’

This telling detail provides one potential answer to the question: What was lost when Eugene razed its first black neighborhood? When the community was displaced and dispersed, according to the article, a sense of community cohesion was lost, and its loss affected newcomers and others who expected to find an interconnected black culture when they arrived in Eugene. Another 1975 quote claims that violent altercations still occur but that regulations are making racist practices less obvious:

Besides the occasional shotgun incidents, the sneering whites and a few beatings by white motorcycle gang members, the most overt racism in Eugene is in housing—but since enactment of public accommodations laws, housing discrimination has become more subtle, blacks say. All a landlord has to say is, “Nothing available.” It takes a research team to prove discrimination has taken place.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ While the KKK’s activities in Eugene during the 19th and early 20th centuries lie outside the scope of this study, local historians Mark Harris and Cheri Turpin have amassed significant archival and anecdotal evidence suggesting that Eugene had an active local chapter and that racially-motivated intimidation and violence may have occurred as late as the 1940s. Even in the 21st Century, city of Eugene representatives have found white supremacy flyers distributed throughout the city.

¹⁰⁵ Housing is regulated by local, state and federal laws, but the Fair Housing Act, Section VIII of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, prohibits discrimination in the sale, rental, and home financing, based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status, or disability.

5/23/77: “One of UO’s First Black Athletes Dies at 72”¹⁰⁶

This is one of the *Register-Guard*’s first commemorative stories. It introduces readers to Charles Williams, one of two black football players to break the color barrier and join the UO team in 1926. The report claims that Williams remembered racism, but told stories without bitterness of the friendship he enjoyed with other players and students. The report states that Williams could not stay on campus but was housed with a private family. As this predates the Ferry Street Bridge families, it is unclear whether Williams lived with a white family or with earlier residents whose names have not emerged from other reports.

3/14/79: “A Street Named...”¹⁰⁷

This report, another in a series of commemorative stories, explains how a pastor at St. Mark’s Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, along with city planners, worked to rename the street on which St. Mark’s was built. In 1979, the name of “Willis Street” was being changed to avoid confusion with another of the same name. St. Marks’ Pastor James Jackson suggested that the street be renamed in honor of Sam Reynolds, a long time leader in the community and an original Ferry Street resident. The city renamed the street “Sam R. Street” (which struck the families and some Eugene residents, including

¹⁰⁶ Mike Thoele, “One of UO’s First Black Athletes Dies at 72” in *The Eugene Register-Guard*, May 23, 1977.

¹⁰⁷ Dan Wyant, “A Street Named...” in *The Eugene Register-Guard*, March 14, 1979.

historians Cheri Turpin and Mark Harris, as disrespectful; they were later involved in convincing the city of Eugene to revert to “Sam Reynolds Street”).

6/7/81: “The Mims of High Street”¹⁰⁸

This three-part story analyzes three generations of Mims’: Annie, Willie C, and David Mims. Annie tells the story of the community that grew up north of the river: “We got along so good together... It was just like camping out.” Her son, Willie C., was interviewed for this report and remains an active and vocal member of Eugene’s founding black families.

12/18/85: “City Loses a Pioneer”¹⁰⁹

This obituary acknowledges Leo Washington as a pioneer for being, along with his wife, “Eugene’s first permanent black residents in modern times.” According to the report, the couple arrived in 1941 from Arkansas and moved to 2nd Street, where they offered their home to black porters on the railroad and black entertainers, including a young Sammy Davis Jr., who could find no other place to stay in Eugene. Though the Washington house was well known as a local safe haven for visiting black celebrities, the date of their arrival in Eugene is disputed, and has been dates as early as 1937.

¹⁰⁸ “The Mims of High Street,” *The Eugene Register-Guard*, June 7, 1981.

¹⁰⁹ Don Bishoff, “City Loses a Pioneer,” *The Eugene Register-Guard*, December 18, 1985.

1/31/93: “Black Island in a Sea of White”¹¹⁰

One of the most complete histories of Eugene’s African-American community and its evolution, Theole’s article, which launched a series of remembrances for Black History Month, includes one of history’s most telling quotes regarding Ferry Street: “If you’re black and you’re new in this town, Ferry Street is one of the first stories that you hear.” This quote from Greg Evans, a one-time mayoral candidate for Eugene, speaks to the enduring quality of the Ferry Street narrative. Ferry Street may have been a short-lived settlement, but it allowed African-Americans pulled west by the shipbuilding, timber and railroad industries to find one another, locate near one another, and build a cohesive network. Another quote from Evelyn Grady, identified as a “white woman who was among a group of Eugene citizens who sided with the black families and battled county government,” referred to Ferry Street as follows: “It was terrible the way they were pushed out. It was a disgrace to our town. It was the most awful thing that ever happened in Eugene.” While this is not a universally held opinion, and is disputed even by contemporary Eugenians who once lived at Ferry Street, it points to the dramatic and disruptive nature of Ferry Street’s demise. Many of the details we know about the evacuation of Ferry Street are drawn directly from Thoele’s research. For instance:

In the larger community, there was enough concern that a committee was formed to help relocate the blacks. But it faced the certainty that few of them would find homes within the city limits... Before county officials, they argued for more time and for razing only the minimum number of houses, while allowing others to remain. The county was not receptive.

¹¹⁰ Mike Thoele, “Black Island in a Sea of White,” *Register-Guard*.

Thoele was also the only source who documented the county's unwillingness to allow any members of the Ferry Street area to remain in place.

A few families had completed their relocation when a mid-July court order called in the bulldozers. The order required razing of only a small number of the Ferry Street homes in an area delineated by certain riverfront streets. But the county ignored the guidelines and destroyed all the homes. 'I don't care what the name of the street is,' County Commissioner Lee Raish told a reporter. 'All them people got to go.'... Sheriff Tom Swartz was there to make sure the mission was completed. Some families were still loading their cars as the demolition began, and several shacks were bulldozed before their owners had the opportunity to remove their possessions.

Finally, with the benefit of hindsight, Thoele was able to add some analysis of these events to his report: "But for those who lived through it, the Ferry Street Village era is seen as a watershed—the first occasion when Eugene blacks asserted their rights and also the first occasion when white citizens allied with them to make the same arguments."

Thoele ends with quotes from both Mattie Reynolds and Willie Mims, who said:

It was hard, really hard... But it was a time when black people started to find out they had a few friends in the community. At the same time that you had restaurants on Willamette Street with their 'Whites only' signs in the windows, you had a lot of people getting deeply involved on the human side of the equation. When I look back, there was some real beauty in all of it.

From this report, a number of points emerge that bolster the significance of the Ferry Street site for its former residents:

1. This site's demolition appears to be one of the first events that brought white Eugenians to the defense of black Eugenians. This is evident also in the *Register-Guard's* coverage of the time. While African-Americans were not often the subjects of previous stories, and editorial tone was variable, in the

summer of 1949, the Ferry Street community was regularly featured in the front section.

2. Former residents like Willie Mims are able to look back and appreciate the experiences they associate with the site. This is born out in contemporary interviews with Willie, as well, detailed in future chapters.
3. It is clear in the quotes from commissioners and in the activities of the sheriff that while sympathy was growing within Eugene's white community, it had not reached such a level that Eugene's white leadership would hold back the bulldozers until families could retrieve all their belongings from their homes, which were demolished in spite of their inability to find other suitable housing. Nor was the demolition confined to prescribed boundaries, which would have preserved some of the buildings.

Such experiences, were they related to extant buildings, could provide support for a National Register nomination under criterion A. Buildings associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history are eligible under this criterion. These demolished homes became a symbol in the African-American community of their powerlessness and their fragile status within the community. But their demolition was also a turning point. While housing shortages were a national problem across the United States, the unlivable conditions here and at the West 11th Ave. site were finally enough to galvanize a coalition of white and black Eugeniens working on behalf of greater equality. The demolition of the Ferry Street village was publicized, turning

housing for African-Americans into a citywide issue. It appears to have been the spark that would ignite a steady movement for civil rights in Eugene throughout the 1950s, 60s and beyond.

5/22/93: "Student Project Touches Hearts"¹¹¹

This story reports on the Jefferson Middle School oral history project—a public commemoration by local students. Jefferson Middle School students interviewed the four remaining matriarchs of Eugene’s early African-American community: Bertha Johnson, Pearlie Lee Washington, Annie Mims and Mattie Reynolds. The students presented copies of their filmed interviews to the public and university libraries and told the reporter they hoped their films would be available for others interested in Eugene’s African-American history. (Unfortunately, the video interviews have disappeared from both the University of Oregon and the Eugene public library catalogs. There is speculation that the videos in the Eugene Public Library were deaccessioned after they were worn out by use, but there is no record of the videos ever being part of the University of Oregon’s library collection, in spite of the fact that former students remember using them in their own research.)

¹¹¹ Paul Neville, "Student Project Touches Hearts," *The Eugene Register-Guard*, May 22, 1993.

2/20/94: “Early Oregon Hostile to Blacks”¹¹²

For black history month, the *Register-Guard* told the story of Jacob Vanderpool, who became, in 1851, the first and only black person to be expelled from the Oregon territory simply because he was black. African-Americans could not legally settle in Oregon because of exclusion laws. It was against the earliest “statutes and laws of the territory of Oregon.” According to the story, in 1849, Oregon’s exclusion law was “eliminated, apparently by a clerical error.” Legislators tried to pass a new exclusion law in 1856. When it went to the people for a vote, “Oregonians voted 8,640 to 1,081 to oppose admission to free blacks and mulattos. Although nullified a decade later by the Civil War amendments to the U.S. constitution, the exclusion clause remained on the books for decades.”

4/11/95: “One of city’s first blacks dies at age 93: ‘Mama’ Mims: She helped lay the foundation for Eugene’s black community after arriving here in 1946”¹¹³

Of the founding families in the Ferry Street Bridge area, Annie Mims was both one of the most active, and one of the most respected. She lived to age 93, and was, according to the obituary, “a mother” to other Ferry Street residents, including Mattie Reynolds, the last living elder from Ferry Street in Eugene.

¹¹² Paul Neville, “Early Oregon Hostile to Blacks,” *The Eugene Register-Guard*, February 20, 1994.

¹¹³ Paul Neville, “One of City’s First Blacks Dies at Age 93,” *The Eugene Register-Guard*, April 11, 1995.

2/12/00: “Elders Honored for Strength, Struggle”¹¹⁴

Since 1993, when the students of Jefferson Middle School interviewed the remaining elders of Eugene’s African-American community for a film project, the community took one day a year to honor these elders for their contributions to Eugene. According to the reporter, Eugene’s younger African-American residents wanted to express the following message: “Eugene’s been good to me, and it’s because of you.” In the quote is a sense of wonder and appreciation for those who struggled in the 1940s and 50s. The story ends on the following quote from activist Mark Harris: “‘I thought, what an example they are,’ Harris said of the founding families. ‘As bad as I think it may be sometimes, they had it worse and they still stayed.’”

10/19/02: “Measure 14 Targets Constitution’s Racism”¹¹⁵

The article reports that 2002’s Measure 14 would remove obsolete language in the constitution that continues to offend with its references to “free Negroes” and the white population, which voted to enter the union as a slave-free state but to also ban black residents in 1857.

¹¹⁴ Anne Williams, “Elders Honored for Strength, Struggle” in *The Eugene Register-Guard*, February 12, 2000.

¹¹⁵ Scott Maben, “Measure 14 Targets Constitution’s Racism,” *The Eugene Register-Guard*, October 9, 2002.

7/19/03: “I Too Am Eugene: Project Studies History and Contributions of Minority Citizens”¹¹⁶

This story shows how Eugene’s history is evolving into publicly shared narratives. It tells the story of public advocates Mark Harris and Cheri Turpin who have designed tours to introduce school children to Eugene’s African-American history. The students visit Wiley Griffon’s grave in the Eugene Masonic Cemetery, tour the site of the Ferry Street village, and meet Mattie Reynolds at the Methodist Church on 11th Ave. Through these tours, children are exposed to the arc of the story regarding African-American struggles to integrate and achieve equality in Eugene.

2/20/05: “The eXit Files: An informal roster of minority professionals exiting Eugene reveals the psychological defeat racism has imposed”¹¹⁷

This report details a social phenomenon seemingly unique to Eugene. The “eXit Files” is the name given to an informal list of African-Americans—often professionals—who lived in Eugene for brief periods during the last few decades and then, for reasons known and unknown, decided to leave. It appears to both confirm African-American grievances related to racial discrimination and provide evidence that Eugene could have a vibrant black community, if black residents felt welcomed into Eugene society today. This report includes quotes from those who left specifically because of racial prejudice and from those who say that race was not instrumental in their decision to leave town.

¹¹⁶ Joe Mosley, “Project Studies History and Contributions of Minority Citizens” in *The Eugene Register-Guard*, July 19, 2003.

¹¹⁷ Jeff Wright, “The eXit Files,” *The Eugene Register-Guard*, February 20, 2005.

Collectively, these newspaper articles provide an interesting timeline for the issues that defined racial politics in Eugene. The evacuation was perhaps the first historic event to capture the attention of Eugeniens and spotlight racial inequalities and their affects on children and families. From this rising awareness rose a public process to improve living conditions, and by the 1950s, the newspapers were leaving behind their portraits of picturesque African-American family life in favor of news about discrimination in housing and employment. Through the last decades of the 20th century, the newspapers, like the rest of the Eugene community, were honoring African-American elders for their persistent work to improve race relations in Eugene. This could be identified as one culturally specific narrative: the story of Eugene's civil rights evolution. That narrative, like those that define Eugene's oldest black families, begins with settlement at Ferry Street.

ORAL HISTORIES

LYLLYE PARKER

Lyllye Parker was interviewed in her office on the University of Oregon campus on April 6, 2009. In our conversation, Lyllye shared the story of her family's relocation to Oregon from Louisiana in 1942. Her father, Sam Reynolds, arrived before her mother, Mattie Reynolds, who came with two children: a three-year-old and an eleven-month old.

The Reynolds family could not find safe, hospitable housing in Eugene and relocated multiple times before they constructed their own home on the north bank of the Willamette River near the Ferry Street Bridge. The family was there in 1946 when Lyllye was born. In consultation with her family members, Lyllye estimated that there were seven to ten families living in the Ferry Street community at its peak and that her family resided there from 1946 to 1949. The following excerpt documents her family's relocation throughout Eugene:

My mom said urban renewal came in and they relocated all the black families. By that time, there was a small settlement on High St between 2nd and 3rd, and the Mims' had moved there and bought houses. The Washingtons had bought a house on 2nd between High and Mill, a duplex. The Joiners had bought a house on Mill between 2nd and 3rd. I am not sure if the Redmonds were there yet or came later. And the Johnsons came later. And the Ruckers rented a house right next to the Mims'. We were relocated to W 11th. And then there was another group of people who were located to Glenwood, and at that time, they called it Skunk Hollow. So there were three separate little black communities in Eugene... Our house burned on W. 11th when I was in 7th grade and my parents rented a house between Pearl and High St. on 7th. I can remember that the school district building was on the corner, and then our house, and then a little alleyway, and then Billy's Groceries. I lived there until my junior year, until urban renewal came in and they wanted to put the federal building on that block. So we were relocated again. And my parents rented a house from Dot Dotson on the corner of 2nd and High. We lived there a couple of years, maybe three, and then urban renewal came in again and moved that whole community between 2nd and 3rd and Mill and High St. because they wanted to put in a residential complex for seniors, so we were all moved again, but by that time, we were in the midst of the social change in Eugene. They couldn't move us to a pocket, and at that time we thought it was great that there were places we could go and live without restriction. My parents rented a house from the University of Oregon between Moss and Villard on 17th, the Washingtons moved to Division Ave, out River Rd. The Redmonds relocated to San Francisco, Mrs. Johnson moved to 12th between Chambers and Hayes. So we were dispersed throughout the city, which meant the next time urban renewal wanted to do something, they would not relocate black people. However, it broke up the black community... I don't believe we lost anything because we still had black communities, and though it was three separate communities, we were still intertwined because some of the folks who lived at Ferry Street Bridge lived in each one of those black communities. And I'm amazed because there weren't

many telephones in our community at that time – that’s when we had party lines – but if there was something going on, there was an information network so that each community knew what was going on in the other community. And if someone needed help, help was forthcoming.

On life at Ferry Street:

In one of the documents I read, somebody said that black people weren’t allowed in the city limits so men couldn’t have jobs and they had to do illegal stuff. Every father in the community had a job. My father worked in a sawmill. Mr. Mims worked in the Benson Hotel. There were laborers for the railroad, there were laborers for construction. They all had legitimate jobs... My father had what we called a juke joint in our home... He had a jukebox. So on the weekends, people would come to our house and my mom would cook and they would dance... My mom didn’t allow alcohol in the house so people would have to have their alcohol out in their cars. That’s not to say they didn’t get drunk. Because one memory I have is my sisters and brothers telling me a fight broke out and one of the men at the house was trying to get under the icebox to get out of the way. My father was always the patron of his house, the patriarch, and he was always about respect so they broke the fight up, and when we moved from Ferry St Bridge to W. 11th, that was the end of that part of my family’s life... Now remember there were only seven or eight families there. So that would mean 16 or fewer adults. And believe you me, if they were at our house, we were either outside playing or in bed somewhere because we were not allowed to mix with the grown-ups... I believe it was kind of a little shotgun house, very plain and very sturdy.

On establishing St. Mark’s Christian Methodist Episcopal Church on West 11th:

My mom was [a member of the Church of England] in Louisiana, and there was a traveling presiding elder who passed through here and connected with my family, and my mom talked about establishing a church here. The church first met in Pearlie and Leo Washington’s home. Uncle Leo wasn’t really a church member, but Aunt Pearlie was. And they actually chartered in their home, and then Rev. J. T. Taylor was the first minister to come and pastor here, and he and the men of the community built the church, and my father had the materials donated by Mr. J.P. O’Neill, who was his employer at the time.

WILLIE C. MIMS

Willie C. Mims was interviewed twice in the spring of 2009. The first interview occurred in his home, and the second occurred on the site of the Ferry Street settlement.

The following excerpt describes the succession of homes his family inhabited at Ferry

Street. The Mims', according to Willie's

memory, left the area in 1948 to buy a

house on High Street in Eugene's oldest

residential neighborhood, now known as

the East Skinner Butte Historic District.

The two houses his family purchased are

still there and are listed on the National

Register of Historic Places (See Figure

3.8):



Figure 3.8: Mims House in the East Skinner Butte Historic District.

When you crossed the river, you went out of the city limits and the land that we settled was, if you can imagine, a pile of chopped up wood for a fireplace. You had acres of that because that was the land owned by [the Eugene Water and Electric Board]. That was their fuel lots. So, what took place and how folks got permission, I don't know. The Reynolds family was already there, as I remember, and my father cleared some room in the woodpile. The material they used was discarded lumber from the lumber mills, which means, it was lumber they were getting ready to burn. It was considered trash. The first building my father built was about waist high. It was like you'd build a fence, just slats around as walls. At one end, there was an area for a doorway, and the rest of it was a tent.... It was square. Just very small, a one room situation. The ground was the floor. And then, sometime later, maybe four or five months, we decided to build a larger house. I hate to call it a house—a larger shack. And the difference was that there were stacks of wood that got the foundation off the ground—probably two feet or three feet off the ground. And then there was a floor built, and this time, the building was still a one-wall building, where you could still actually see daylight, but there was a roof over it. The place might have been 20 x 20, I'd say. There weren't

actually real rooms in the place that I can remember. The big difference was there was a roof and no tent and it was off the ground. And one reason it needed to be off the ground was because there was no dam on the Willamette River and all of that land over there was low land. So every time the river rose—which it did every year—it flooded over there. One thing I should say to you is that I don't remember there being more than five structures assembled over there.

Q: Was there a porch?

A: No porch.

Q: And the walls were still up and down slats or sideways?

A: They ran horizontal.

Q: And the, windows?

A: No windows.

Q: And was the roof flat or peaked?

A: I would think it would have probably been flat and slanted.

Q: So one side higher than the other?

A: Yeah, yeah. I would imagine that's what it was.

Q: So you had the two structures. How long did you live in the second structure?

A: I would say we probably lived there less than a year. It was only a couple years all together that we lived over there.

On the layout of the landscape:

Well, if you can imagine, again, there were acres of these piles of wood, right? And so the trucks had to deliver the wood and take the wood out to the plants. There were little roads going in between, here and there. Kind of like busy little forest roads, you see? And so there was no structural sequence to where people built houses except they built them along those little roads. I would say that we were probably a good fifty yards from what is now Martin Luther King Blvd.

On the Ferry Street Chapel:

The only thing I really remember about the church is my mom and I taking a picture with Paul Robeson... She lost the picture. In fact, I would say she lost the picture in the 70s... I just get chills when I think about that. Senator Hatfield—I think he was a state senator at the time¹¹⁸ -- For some reason or another, he was making this tour, trying to make things better and getting the racism quieted down and that sort of thing in Oregon. And he brought Paul Robeson out, and one of the trips he took Paul Robeson on was out here.... I just remember looking at a picture. I didn't know who the guy was. I knew he wasn't Gene Autry, you know, or Roy Rogers. I knew that, so I didn't have a lot of interest.

On racism in Eugene:

I remember seeing “Whites Only” signs downtown Eugene. My father could actually pass for white. He once got kicked out of a bar because he was waiting for me. He was having a beer; I was reading a comic book across the street. And I came in to see if he was ready to go, and he said, ‘OK, let me have one more beer.’ And the bartender asked him, ‘Is that your son?’ And my father said, ‘Yeah, that’s my boy.’ And he said, ‘I’m sorry, we can’t serve you here anymore.’ So it was those kinds of conditions for the grown-ups.

On life at Ferry Street:

We had all this wood territory. We would romp over the wood, playing cowboys and Indians, plus we had the forbidden river, which we learned to swim in. Plus, all of this [gestures at map] was agricultural land. All of this back here was bean fields and peach orchards, the Chase Garden area, by Autsen, all of that was farmland... Diamond Canneries was here, and beats, corn, and beans were staples. I mean, you had trucks rolling during the growing season like mad. There was no such thing as kids not having any work. And all of this area over here [gestures at map], and going out River Road you had nuts, peach orchards, you had all kinds of things like that. And they grew things like tomatoes and cucumbers. This is some of the most fertile land in the country, where all the housing is now, across Ferry Street Bridge.

On the West 11th site, where his best friends, the Nettles, moved:

They came here because of the logging industry, and they weren't able to get a job so they got stuck. They were hoping to work in the lumber industry, period.

¹¹⁸ Mark O. Hatfield did serve as U.S. Senator from 1967 to 1997, but he was attending Stanford University during Ferry Street's peak era [in 1947 and 1948]. He returned to Salem, Oregon to teach political science from 1949 to 1955 at Willamette University. In 1951, he was first elected to the Oregon State House of Representatives. See the Mark O. Hatfield biography on the website of Willamette University's Mark O. Hatfield Library: http://library.willamette.edu/about/hatfield_bio/. [Accessed August 6, 2009].

They didn't know anything about Eugene or Springfield. Except they knew they were hiring like mad for the lumber industry. Mills were going up everywhere.

Q: And they still couldn't find work?

A: Nope. Turned down... When people moved from the Ferry Street Bridge area to the W. 11th area, we were on county property. And when they moved to W. 11th, they had to work it out where people could own the piece of land. But it was still outside the city limits, and it was land that nobody else wanted... That whole area out there, people didn't farm on it. It was unproductive land. If you drive past 18th now, and that area where you see fields and no houses, you notice that nobody grows anything out there. Surely, over time, as you go back, people tried to farm and to grow stuff, but evidently, the land out there just didn't produce. Too hard to farm.

MATTIE REYNOLDS

Ms. Mattie Reynolds is the last living member of the original generation of Ferry Street neighbors. She remembers moving her two children to Oregon in December 1942 and being relocated multiple times before settling across the bridge, where Sam Reynolds built a square three-bedroom house out of the lumber from his own sawmill. When the county reclaimed the property, the Reynolds family moved to West 11th, where regular flooding meant that someone had to come to the site and rescue the children while the adults stayed and weathered the storms. She tells the following story of arriving in Eugene and trying to find housing:

Sam came to Eugene and met a lumberman by the name of Mr. Spicer, and he asked Sam if he wanted a job at the sawmill. So Sam told him, yeah. And the man said, 'Just as soon as we can find you a place to live, I'll send a truck to move you all,' which he did. The man came to move us, and he moved us out there on 6th Street to a rooming house. And when we got there and started unloading the truck, the landlord came and told us, 'Well, I'm sorry. I thought I was renting to your boss and we don't rent to colored people.' So then they took us over by Four Corners to a motel out there and put us up in the motel—and asked us not to let the kids go outside. Well, OK. That's well and good. So then we found us a place downtown on Pearl Street right between 6th and 7th. And we were moving in the

back door and white folks were moving out the front. So, OK. We stayed there for about two weeks, and he found us a house out there on 7th and Van Buren. So we move in there. So when we moved in there, some person came by and asked me, were we in the service, the Army? We told him no. He said, 'Well, you all better try to get somewhere because you can't stay here.' And they would come and bring bikes over, put them on our lawn and break them up because my two kids were there, see, and they would say they were stolen bikes. But the police didn't believe them. We had to have protection around our house over there on 7th Street. So, OK. Finally, Sam and two more white men bought a sawmill out on Lorane Highway, so we moved out there. And we stayed out there until we went broke, and the sawmill got taken away from us. So then, Sam built us a house. We built a *house* over across the Ferry Street Bridge, and that's where we stayed until the county put us off the land. There were, I'd say, about six or seven black families over there.

Throughout these oral histories, Willie Mims and members of the Reynolds family would mention other families: the Nettles, the Johnsons, the Washingtons, the Stubbs, the Henrys and others. Many of the original family members have moved away or passed away, and the details of their settlement in Eugene are harder to verify. For the sake of this study, these three subjects are the only local former residents of Ferry Street who are willing to discuss their history. However, their accounts, which differ in a few areas, may differ from other accounts.

WHAT IS MISSING

While the previously mentioned texts and interviews provide a great deal of information, they by no means represent all that is known or all that has been produced in relation to Eugene's early African-American community. Some key documents may yet

emerge to further our understanding. Below are examples of texts and resources still being sought.

1. The Jefferson Middle School interviews: In the mid-1990s, the students interviews were donated on VHS tapes to the University of Oregon's Knight Library and to the Eugene Public Library. Even with the help of archivists at both locations, the tapes could not be located in the Spring of 2009. Through the generosity of local historians, Mark Harris and Cheri Turpin, an unofficial and incomplete transcript was made available for this study. While it is helpful in identifying some of the topics of conversation, the loss of public copies of these interviews is profoundly disappointing. It is the author's hope that the one known copy, which remains in the hands of one of the student interviewers, will eventually be reproduced and reentered into the public archives.
2. Un-indexed newspaper accounts: While searching for key dates in the archives of *The Oregonian* and the *Register-Guard* yielded excellent coverage of the Ferry Street families during and directly after relocation, very little was available leading up to the site's demolition. Further review dating from the early 1940s might supplement our knowledge of the site's early history.

CHAPTER IV

THE DEATH OF AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN VILLAGE

*Inherent in the dilemma over displacement and the paucity of scholarship in ethnic history is the basic question of who should determine the future for the past. The preservation professionals? The descendents of those who created the past? Or the current owners and occupants?*¹¹⁹

-- Antoinette J. Lee

THE EMERGING NARRATIVE: DEFINING AN ERA

This study explores a fairly short but intense chapter in the history of Eugene's black community. The Ferry Street village grew on the banks of the Willamette River at a time when no black businesses were located in the downtown core and when signs barring "Negroes" were still visible in shop windows.¹²⁰ Perhaps because of changing attitudes towards race and the resulting Civil Rights battles, the story of Eugene's Ferry Street village is preserved as a culturally specific narrative. It defines the kernel of Eugene's relatively prosperous contemporary African-American community, and tells the stories of the hardships these families endured while the nation was changing its

¹¹⁹ Antoinette J. Lee, "Discovering Old Cultures in the New World: The Role of Ethnicity," in *The American Mosaic: Preserving a Nation's Heritage*, ed. Robert Stipe (Washington D.C.: United States Committee International Council on Monuments and Sites, 1987), 203.

¹²⁰ Willie C. Mims, interviewed by the author, Eugene, OR, March 2009.

collective mind about what whiteness and blackness meant within a social context.

While there definitely were white families living at Ferry Street in the 1940s, they play a different role in the narrative of place. It appears, from newspaper reports, that white residents were isolated from the rest of Eugene purely because of socioeconomic class.

They could not afford post-war housing in Eugene. The black community, however, was isolated by class *and* race, and race was apparently the most important factor. Even when they could afford housing, they could not find a haven within Eugene's racist society.

The narrative of overcoming such barriers—especially racial prejudice, which appears to be particularly unjust—makes heroes of its subjects and villains of their opposition, the ruling white elite who either took advantage of or simply ignored the disparities that Eugene's African-American community struggled against.

This narrative of “overcoming” is continually shared and refined within Eugene's contemporary African-American community because it reminds members of the very recent and debilitating racism that their parents and grandparents endured. While this history can be painful—which likely explains why not all former residents of Ferry Street are willing to share their stories with academics or reporters—it appears to serve many goals. It can bring pride to later generations of the community, who focus on the fine qualities of their elders; it can provide a model of behavior for those faced with contemporary racism; and it can bring honor to those who worked—and succeeded—in improving housing and employment conditions for their children.

However, the narrative changes depending on the telling. Willie Mims remembers growing up fondly and notes that he was spared any discussion of hardship by the

community's elders. He does not dwell either on poverty or race, but tells the story of his family's upward climb. Their first house was the most modest, he explains, and then it was improved, and then the family moved to two fine houses in Eugene's historic district. His narrative tends to be very generous, fondly identifying his friends, their games, and the famous people who visited the community in his youth. Even when he describes racism, it seems to inspire neither anger nor bitterness. This appears to be a different approach than that of other former residents, including Lyllye Parker, who emphasizes both the closeness of the early African-American community and the great struggles her community endured while improving living conditions for future family and friends in Eugene. This message seems designed to inspire pride and courage in the African-Americans who hear it and to honor those who struggled.

Lyllye's mother, Mattie Reynolds, tells a more modest narrative. She remembers the pleasures of forming a church with her friends and neighbors and tells the story of her family's arrival with a sense of awe and surprise. Pervasive racism seems almost secondary to the fact that Eugene had so few African-Americans when she arrived. It is this first-person narrative, the narrative of a pioneer, that seems to have the most authority regarding Ferry Street. As the only adult who witnessed multiple relocations due to community prejudice, Mrs. Reynolds' narrative is one of the outsider, constantly under scrutiny until she and her community began to actively engage in civil rights activities.

All of these variations on the Ferry Street narrative give us windows into the production of "cultural memory," the public defining and reiteration of cultural identity.

Narratives, Jeanette Rodrigues and Ted Forier explain in their book, *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith and Identity*, show how we produce our own identities through the process of thought: “The power of cultural memory rests in the conscious decision to choose particular memories, and to give those memories precedence in communal remembrance... Cultural memory transmits an experience rooted in history that has reached a culturally definitive, potentially transformative status.”¹²¹

The lessons and intentions embedded in narrative change with each telling and with each audience, but the story that emerges from Ferry Street seems to carry with it some of the weightiest themes of the 20th century: race and class and how they define and confine us; power and how it is wielded over those who do not own their own land nor their own homes; the evolution of the concept of race (i.e. how it changed once typical white Americans became aware of the disparities between themselves and their neighbors). The power of the construction of narrative may rest with the teller, but the listener is not a passive recipient. As listeners to the narrative of the Ferry Street village, as told through public documents and personal remembrances, we experience a privileged view of the cultural identity of a community that was shaped by race and class. It is our responsibility, as receivers, to determine how far this narrative spreads and whether its themes have power to “transform” not just those who participated, but those who hear.

It was through the documentation of the demolition and the resulting hardship that public sentiment towards Eugene’s black families began to change. Sensing that the community might have some obligation to improve living conditions, the city of Eugene

¹²¹ Jeanette Rodríguez, Ted Fortier, *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith and Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007) 12.

finally followed the guidance of progressive white and black residents. The university, the newspapers and the openness of Eugene's black community finally contributed to a legal end to housing and employment discrimination—though social racism is far from eradicated even now.

It is not surprising that these resulting narratives have such resonance in Eugene today. The strength of the community emerged from the fact that these families were already alike in one way: they were not welcome within the city's boundaries.¹²² Though Eugene has always had a small number of African-American residents, the Ferry Street site was the first independent black neighborhood in Eugene. Its evolution can be divided into three distinct periods, though the dates are inexact due to discrepancies in the records:

1. Ca. 1945 – 1947: the settlement era, during which time families new to Eugene came to grips with their social status and abandoned the city for the outlying Ferry Street Bridge area.
2. Ca. 1947 – 1948: the peak era, during which time residents improved their properties and codified traditions related to social, civic, and religious life
3. 1949: the displacement era, during which time the buildings were removed and the families relocated to the three Eugene neighborhoods discussed below.

Oral histories can provide details related to the second and third periods of habitation, but public documents reveal little about either the first or the second. The

¹²² The Ferry Street site was associated with sharecropping in the *Willakenzie Historic Context Statement*, which includes a picture of white and black children on site. Johnson, *Willakenzie Historic Context*, 41.

displacement era is the most accessible as it occurred during a volatile time. After World War II, recognition of a local and national housing crisis drove a movement for rent control, which regularly appeared on the front pages of the local newspapers. At the same time, Title 1 of the Federal Housing Act of 1949 established the nation's first urban renewal program.¹²³ In cities, barriers between black and white communities were being challenged in the courts.¹²⁴ By 1951, these upheavals in housing policy were central to the sociological discourse among scholars. The following quote appeared in a 1951 article in the *American Journal of Sociology*:

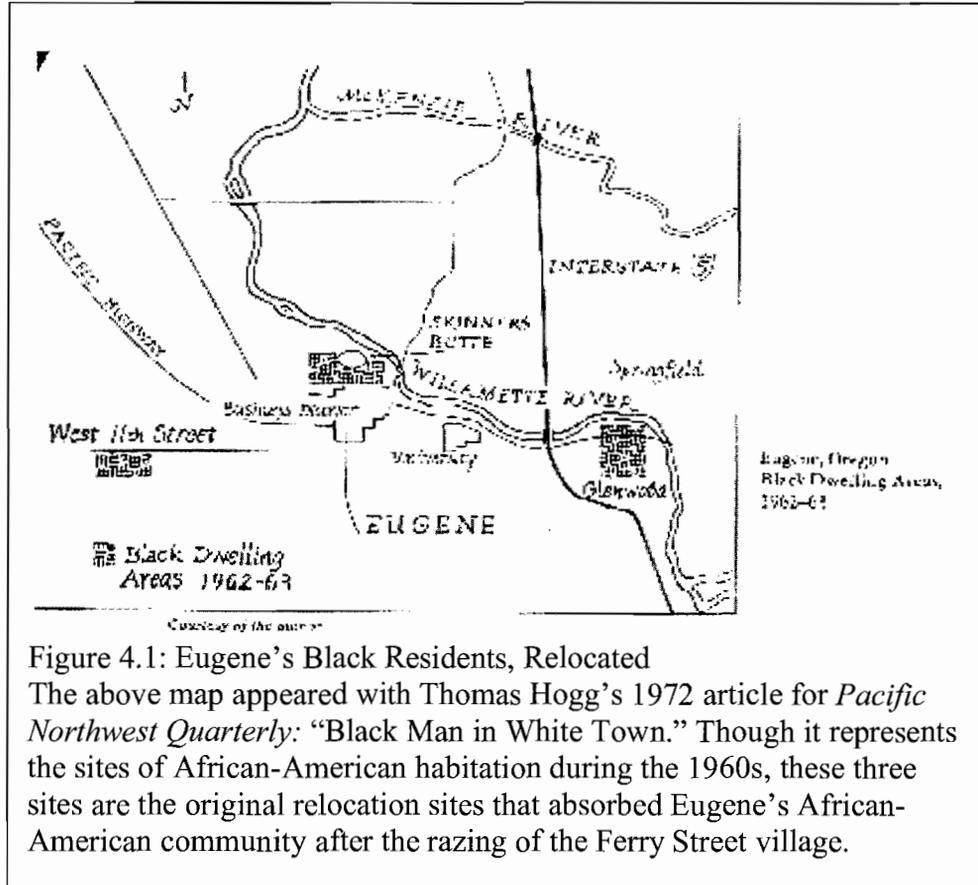
The vast majority of thinking persons in America today would agree that 'something should be done' to improve current racial and cultural relationships. There is, however, no unanimity as to what that something should be.... There has been a shift on the part of minority-group leaders to the more direct action of legislation and the courts. That this has been a major change in policy is evidenced by the fact that in state legislatures alone, between January 1 and September 1, 1949, one hundred and forty-nine bills opposing discrimination were introduced.¹²⁵

In Eugene, the displacement of the African-American community inspired a citywide conversation about race and property rights. In public documents from the displacement era, the story of resettlement emerges. Sources agree that the Ferry Street families were able to find housing in three distant locations, as seen below in Figure 4.1:

¹²³ For a concise history of urban renewal in Oregon, see Tashman Johnson LLC's "Legislative History of Urban Renewal in Oregon," available through the Portland Development Commission's website, https://www.pdc.us/pdf/about/urban_renewal_legislative_history.pdf [Accessed June 6, 2009].

¹²⁴ John H. Burma, "Race Relations and Antidiscriminatory Legislation," *The American Journal of Sociology* 56, no. 5 (Mar., 1951), 416 – 423.

¹²⁵ Burma, "Race Relations," 416.



- 1: A neighborhood on High Street between 2nd and 4th streets. This location, just east of the Ferry Street Bridge site, is located near the northern edge of what is now the city's East Skinner Butte Historic District. It was, in the late 1940s, considered the city's poor neighborhood.
- 2: Glenwood, a swatch of county land sitting east of Eugene between Eugene and Springfield.
- 3: West 11th Ave. along Amazon Creek, a site which was three miles west of the city boundaries

Some of the High Street neighborhood retains much of its integrity and the neighborhood's historic homes are well maintained and valued for their 19th and early 20th century styles. The Mims family still owns the two historic homes they purchased in 1948, and one of those homes, now known as the Annie D. Guesthouse, has been a local historic landmark since 1979. While the Mims family has retained their property, we know from the Reynolds family that other African-Americans were relocated to accommodate two different public projects: the construction of the Campbell Center, a community gathering place for adults 55 and older, and the new Federal Courthouse. This series of relocations seemed to regularly target city neighborhoods where African-American families gathered.

Glenwood, the second site of resettlement, receives less attention in the written record. Contemporary sources from Ferry Street never lived there, but the site's settlement is described by the League of Women Voters as follows: "A number of others found small shacks for high rent in the Glenwood district in an alley off of S. Concord Ave. Although some plumbing and repairs have been added, these Glenwood homes are very small and are crowded close together."¹²⁶ Another description emerges from the Oakley Glenn report:

There was no thought to integrating the Eugene community. In the mean time, a small group of black families had moved into the Glenwood community that lies between Eugene and Springfield. This area was inhabited by low income whites,

¹²⁶ LWV, *Negro in Eugene*, 3.

most of whom had lived in the area for some time. The black families were accepted but ignored. There were few incidents of racial tension in this area.¹²⁷

The West 11th Ave. site received the majority of the attention from the surrounding Eugene community. The new residents visibly struggled to build their homes on land with no running water, no relief from the frequent floods on Amazon Creek, and no city services. Conditions at this location were so deplorable that members of the general public were finally moved to address issues of housing and employment for Eugene's black residents. The Ferry Street community, while equally challenged, never attracted the same level of support and concern from Eugene's progressive community.

Today, the West 11th site is the permanent home of St. Mark's Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, built in 1949, immediately after relocation. The church, which still houses the piano once used at the Ferry Street Chapel, has not been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places or received any other historic designation. The fact that the church still stands on W. 11th and that the Mims family still owns National Register-listed properties on High Street would have made either of these locations appropriate sites for study. However, tools already exist for the preservation of these buildings through existing programs. The invisible history associated with Ferry Street Bridge predates both these sites and proves more challenging. It is, therefore, a more demanding site for study.

¹²⁷ Oakley Glen report, 5.

FERRY STREET: THE SETTLEMENT ERA

At Ferry Street, the first generation consisted of the adults who moved their families to Eugene and settled on the north bank of the river and constructed their own homes. Currently, only one member of the first generation remains: Mattie Reynolds celebrated her 90th birthday in 2008. Her memories of the site seem surprisingly strong, but not comprehensive.

Their children make up the second generation. These are more abundant in Eugene than are members of the first generation, but their memories are not as clear. As Lyllye Parker explained, she really grew up on West 11th.¹²⁸ This is true even though she was born while the Reynolds family lived at the Ferry Street village. Willie C. Mims remembers Ferry Street as a young boy, and he too has stronger memories of Eugene during later eras.¹²⁹

It is unknown how the first generation chose the Ferry Street site, but public documents refer to a tacit agreement with Lane County: “County government, with a wink and a nod, gave the signal that the community would tolerate them settling on county-owned property on the north side of the Willamette at Ferry Street, just outside the city limits.”¹³⁰ This fact may have caused former resident Willie C. Mims to refer to

¹²⁸ Lyllye Parker, interviewed by the author, Eugene, OR, April 6, 2009.

¹²⁹ Willie C. Mims, interviewed by the author, Eugene, OR, March 25, 2009.

¹³⁰ Mike Thoele, “Black Island in a Sea of White,” *Register-Guard*.

the family's residency as "squatting": "We were squatting, you know. And it just seems to me, there was just a limited amount of things that folks could do."¹³¹

Residents at Ferry Street generally came from the South. The Reynolds family was from Shreveport, Louisiana, the Mims family was from Texas, and Willie C. Mims remembers that the Nettles family was from Arkansas. The Washingtons, who always lived in town and not at Ferry Street, but were very close to the community, were also from Arkansas.¹³² These families generally came in hopes of improving their employment opportunities, or, as in the case of Sam Reynolds, to escape potential retaliation against himself or his family after an altercation with a white man.¹³³

Though the site has become closely identified with Eugene's black community, the Willakenzie Report, referenced earlier, defines the location as a location for farm worker families.¹³⁴

Photos collected by EWEB show that the site did have a history of occupation, even before the Ferry Street families arrived. One such photo from 1932 (Figure 4.2 below) shows three shacks lined up and facing the river. They appear to be located near the foot of a bridge or bridge supports. These are assumed to be portions of the Ferry Street Bridge.

¹³¹ Willie C. Mims, interviewed by the author, March 25, 2009.

¹³² Wright and Pinyerd, *Eugene Modernism 1935-1965*.

¹³³ Lyllie Parker, interviewed by the author, April 2009.

¹³⁴ Johnson, *Willakenzie Historic Context*, 41.



Figure 4.2: Eugene's "Hobo Camp," 1932

This photo, courtesy of the Eugene Water and Electric Board, was captioned as follows: "No. 1234, Flood of March 19, 1932. Looking downstream along north side of New Filter Plant toward hobo camp. By C. A. McClain."

The Ferry Street village site was prone to extreme flooding, a situation that was being rectified just as the land was cleared and the Ferry Street families relocated. Dams were under construction in numerous places to create a consistent riverbank and more robust flood control, leading some to speculate that the land became increasingly valuable while the black community at Ferry Street grew, creating a catalyst for commercial redevelopment. This is speculation, however, and has not been verified. We do know that the bridge reconstruction project predates African-American settlement, which seems to dispute this possible interpretation.

Though flooding was a problem for the Ferry Street residents, it also predated them. Long time Eugenic Lloyd Bissell remembers rescuing approximately five or six

people from this site in the early 1942.¹³⁵ He remembers that some of the evacuees carried camping tents, but that they were not African-American. Like the Willakenzie report, Bissell associated the squatting families with the nearby farms and not with African-American settlement. If early settlers did live in tents on the land, then the name “Tent City” may have predated the black community as well.

As a nickname, “Tent City” has always offended the Reynolds family.¹³⁶ They remember none of the houses being covered with tarps or tents. The only structure they remember with a tent roof was the Ferry Street Chapel. Though a permanent church was built at the West 11th Ave. location, the Ferry Street families created a wood framed building that was covered by a tightly fit canvas roof and added a sign saying “Ferry Street Chapel.” The single known picture, included below in Figure 4.3, shows a number of interesting details. The frame of the structure was at least partially clad in horizontal planks. The crawl space beneath the structure appears to be covered by vertical planks, and the approach to the building appears to be fairly flat and solid, as if a narrow concrete sidewalk had been laid. The tent roof appears to be crafted specifically to fit the hip-roof structure and seems to form tight seals around the doors and around the bottom. All together, the structure appears to be carefully and tightly constructed. Since the settlement appeared directly after the end of the war, it is possible the tent roofs were actually Army surplus tents that were reused. If so, the frames may have been built specifically for them.

¹³⁵ Lloyd Bissell, interviewed by the author, Eugene, Oregon, April 2009.

¹³⁶ Parker, interviewed by the author, 2009.



Figure 4.3: The Ferry Street Chapel
Founding members, 1948. Courtesy of Mark Harris. Photographer unknown.

This may also have been the case for some of the residences. Though the homes appear to have been made of sawn wood, they were of different degrees of permanence. Mattie Reynolds remembers that her family had access to milled lumber while Willie Mims remembers that the family's first and second homes were constructed of scrap wood. Willie also remember that his family's first home was covered by a tent roof over four short plank walls, and that it had an earthen floor.

The size and layout of these structures appeared to have varied. While Mattie Reynolds remembers her family inhabiting a three-bedroom square wooden house with a roof and windows, Willie Mims remembers that his first house was a modest one-room building with no windows, but also square in plan. His family's second dwelling included a modest partition dividing the square 20 x 20' room into two rooms.

Descriptions of the other houses are not available, though Willie recalls that the Nettles family, with which he was close, also covered their framed home with a tent roof.

FERRY STREET: THE PEAK ERA

During 1947 and 1948, the settlement at Ferry Street grew to include the eight households remembered by Mattie Reynolds: Reynolds, Mims, Johnson, Nettles, Lester, Garrets, Holt & Henry, and Frenchwell. The Ferry Street village also welcomed occasional visitors to Eugene. Gandy dancers who repaired rails and ties and railroad porters visited the village, as did the occasional celebrity.

While the site was isolated from central Eugene, Willie Mims remembers that the families did business with numerous local merchants. The families used to get cuts of meat that were discarded by the meat packers at the Irish-McBroom Packing Company to the north of the settlement. They used to get water from the Richfield gas station off of Coburg Road. A rendering plant existed next to a nearby slough and the slough was used as a dumping site for the company's refuse, Willie remembers. The Wolf family,

according to Lloyd Bissel, also owned a trucking company and other businesses in the region.

FERRY STREET: RESETTLEMENT

*The move from the Ferry Street Bridge location cannot be called a failure, but it fell far short of any real accomplishment.*¹³⁷

-- Oakly V. Glenn

Once the Ferry Street families were evicted from Ferry Street, their plight began to attract media attention and inspire public concern, but this did not stop the bulldozers from tearing down their homes in 1949 and dividing their social network among three distant locations on the outskirts of Eugene. Post-resettlement, Eugene's African-American community lost its anonymity and began to participate in a local and national drive toward civil rights for all Americans. The great shift in cultural norms related to race and ethnicity can be found to have taken place in the space of one lifetime.

Mattie Reynolds arrived in Eugene, Oregon during an era in which racism was still unabashedly common. Within her lifetime, racism, though still practiced in private, became illegal in all public interactions. In Eugene, the Reynolds and Mims families were actively involved in bringing a new social consciousness to Eugene. According to

¹³⁷ Glenn report, 5.

Willie Mims, the elders, including his mother and Mattie Reynolds, protested, organized and actively pushed for equality for themselves and their families.¹³⁸

While details of this cultural evolution can be culled from interviews and oral histories, knitted together to form a kind of pastiche of 20th century social history, the stories of Ferry Street are uniquely ethereal. Though heritage tourists and researchers might like nothing more than to visit the Reynolds' juke joint as it existed, preserved as a house museum complete with jukebox and a living history cast willing to interpret the social life of Eugene's African-American community in 1949, the site was never celebrated by greater Eugene for its cultural richness and history. This is evident through the very first public meetings held on the subject of race in Eugene in the early 1950s; as we have seen, the first public forum was entitled: "The Negro Problem in Eugene."¹³⁹

WHAT WAS LOST?

Architecture has gone largely unconsidered as an area of Afro-American expertise, but many buildings were raised by the labor of black carpenters, masons, and plasterers; more importantly, one of the most common house types in the United States, the "shotgun house" ... results from the implementation of African and Afro-American architectural philosophies.¹⁴⁰

-- John Michael Vlach

¹³⁸ Mims, interviewed by the author, 2009.

¹³⁹ Editorial Staff, "On the Eve of Lincoln's Birthday," *The Eugene Register-Guard*, February 10, 1952.

¹⁴⁰ John Michael Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts*. (Cleveland, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1978), 4.

We cannot know exactly how the Ferry Street dwellings were constructed, nor on which models. As we know, residents of Eugene's Ferry Street community came west from southern states like Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana, and we know that migration throughout the U.S. has expanded the reach of various traditional building crafts. We do not have the extant buildings, however, to analyze as examples of western architecture built by and for African-Americans recently arrived from the South. What we lost, when Eugene razed its first black neighborhood, was a record of early settlement architecture expediently designed and constructed for Eugene's first black families.

While the loss may seem minor by some standards—these were neither grand nor permanent buildings—the author cannot help wondering what might have developed from these small buildings had the site been improved over time. Applying the concept of cultural weathering, addressed in Chapter 2, these buildings might have provided single cells that were expanded and improved for much larger and culturally distinct homes over time. This pattern has been observed in other settlement areas.

It is also possible that these simple buildings might have eventually provided shelter to a new generation of settlers to Eugene, or a new cultural group who arrived once the founding African-American families were integrated into the city proper. Neighborhood spaces are often claimed, ceded and reclaimed as cultural groups march through the integration process. This process was occurring in Eugene just as African-American families were settling here. What was lost when these buildings were destroyed was a record of the beginning of Eugene's evolution as an integrated city.

HOUSING TYPES: PATTERNS AND MODELS

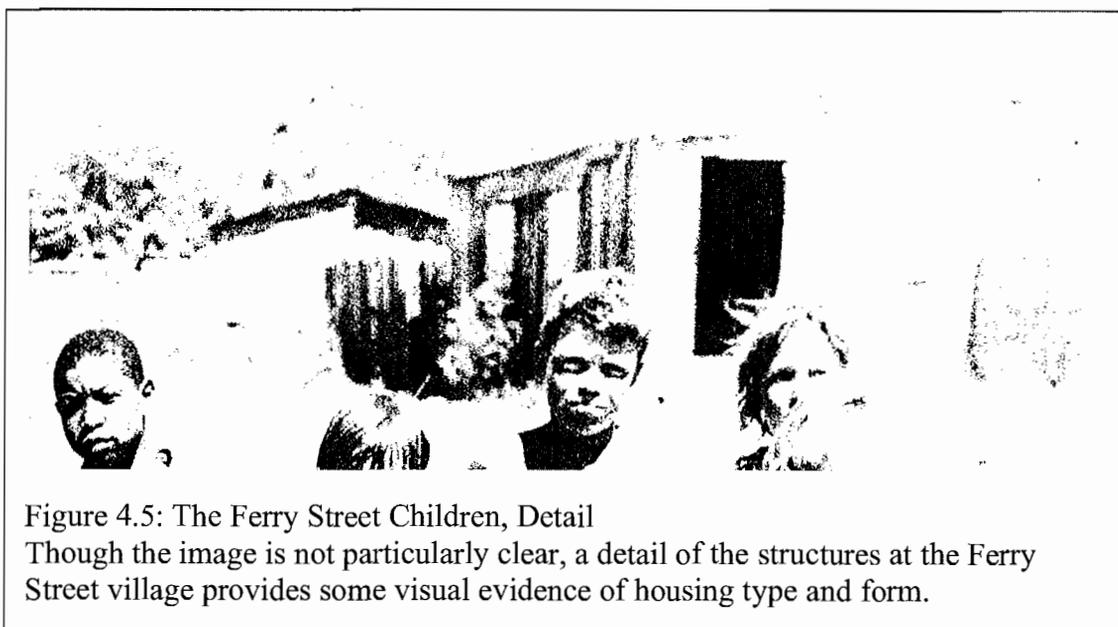
What remains is a small amount of photographic evidence. In the excellent photo below (Figure 4.4)—the only Ferry Street photo showing actual structures in the background—we see some clues to building practices. The buildings are clad in horizontal lapped siding, they appear to be single or two-room dwellings with fences and tarpaper roofs, in some cases.



Figure 4.4: The Ferry Street Children

The Johnson children and a white family gather around the water pump at Ferry Street. In the background are houses clad in random width lapped board siding.

This photo provides enough detail to confirm that these buildings do not appear to resemble typical local forms or typical forms associated with African-Americans from other parts of the county—the Southern shotgun house, for instance. Discovering models for these homes, should any exist, would take further study. It is not known whether the carpenters who constructed Ferry Street’s residences had ever built homes before, whether they consulted plans or looked to their surrounding environment for guidance. Viewing a detail of these buildings, (Figure 4.5), we see Eugene’s first structures built by and for African-American settlers who came to a hostile environment and built expediently because they were in need of shelter.



This description is similar to historic descriptions of other settlers. For instance, these homes might have shared much in common with the early shelters of settlers in the East. In his seminal work, *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay*, Abbott Lowell

Cummings describes a collection of types that were popular subsistence models for the earliest English settlers.¹⁴¹ It is here that Cummings introduces us to models that sharply resemble Ferry Street's first houses, if not in plan, at least in materials and construction method: "Edward Johnson, for example, writing about 1650, reports of the company's first landing at Charlestown that the colonists 'pitched some Tents of Cloath, other built them small Huts, in which they lodged their Wives and Children.'"¹⁴²

"Tents of clothe" and "small huts" are fairly good descriptions of what Ferry Street's settlers built when they arrived and were in immediate need of shelter. But Cummings goes further, cautioning that the building of these efficient dwellings were not necessarily the result of "pioneer conditions in a new world, forcing the adoption of existing native types or the spontaneous creation of others adapted to the environment" but "transplantation... of types current in England, still characteristic then of the great body of minor dwellings in the country districts."¹⁴³

The same may very well have been true of Ferry Street's pioneers. They may have borrowed some elements familiar to them from the home place, or they may have referenced other long-familiar plans and materials and methods of construction. Clearly, the forms differ when climate and the available materials differ, but both developments perfectly fit the description that Cummings settles on: "We can only suggest that the newly arrived Englishmen may indeed have borrowed from some long-familiar

¹⁴¹ Abbott Lowell Cummings, *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), 20.

¹⁴² Cummings, *Framed Houses*, 18.

¹⁴³ Cummings, *Framed Houses*, 18. Cited as follows: Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and the Early Republic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 3.

subvernacular building traditions in throwing together the rude structures which were to shelter them for the first winter at least.”¹⁴⁴

This is an important lens through which to view the dwellings constructed by the Ferry Street families. Surely, they were not pilgrims arriving in a new location without any resources. The Reynolds families could easily access a grocery store. But there are similarities. Mattie Reynolds describes arriving in Oregon on a train and waiting for her husband Sam to collect her:

And I just sat there in the station with my two kids, and at about 6 o'clock, a black man came to the station. He walked in and he said, "Lady, you don't know why I'm looking at you," so I said, "No." He said, "I ain't seen no colored folks in months." I said, "Oh, my Goodness."

Mattie Reynolds was a stranger to the West, and she was different from the dominant culture. When she arrived, carrying her youngest two children, she knew no one but Sam. As a young couple, Sam and Mattie cleared a space on the landscape in unincorporated territory. Because of long-held biases and a tradition of racism, the Reynolds family had to construct shelter for themselves or have none. Their neighbors lived without indoor plumbing, without running water and on a regularly flooded plane. Together, they had to found their own church, "trade" with the "native" white population, and pool resources.

Clearly, it would be overstating these similarities to take the argument much further. However, the similarities are enough to suggest that the buildings first constructed by Ferry Street settlers were simple and small for all the same reasons that settlers to the New World first constructed simple, small dwellings. While most early

¹⁴⁴ Cummings, *Framed Houses*, 19.

settlement dwellings are impermanent, these structures may have been designed specifically for impermanence and out of expediency. Like many settlers in the New World, the Ferry Street families moved from impermanent structures to well-appointed homes over time. They formed community associations, and they produced new generations that have continued to see this place as their own.

To learn anything more regarding the construction type, plan, and materials of these first dwellings, new photographic or recorded evidence would have to appear.

WHY DID WE LOSE EUGENE'S FIRST BLACK NEIGHBORHOOD?

One of the historiographic goals of this study was to explore the role that urban renewal played in the demolition of the Ferry Street neighborhood. From public documents, it is clear that the Ferry Street village was razed for one stated reason: the construction of a new Ferry Street Bridge. However, issues of race and class played a role in how the demolition proceeded. For instance, one member of the community remembers was unable to remove his belongings before his house was demolished. He apparently launched a lawsuit against the county, but no such case has been found, and no one remembers the name of the litigant. Since the litigant would have been a "squatter," he may have had no legal standing.

Members of the founding community also remember that urban renewal was a catalyst for their first relocation. However, urban renewal did not officially come to Eugene until long after the demolition of the Ferry Street homes. The federal law passed

in 1949, but Oregon's state law did not pass until 1951, and Eugene's urban renewal agency was not founded until 1958.¹⁴⁵ Though urban renewal agencies using federal funds earmarked for housing were not directly responsible for Ferry Street's eradication, there are similarities. As a federal policy, urban renewal was officially designed to clear urban slums and provide funds for the redevelopment of improved housing:

The Congress hereby declares that the general welfare and security of the Nation and the health and living standards of its people require housing production and related community development sufficient to remedy the serious housing shortage, the elimination of substandard and other inadequate housing through the clearance of slums and blighted areas, and the realization as soon as feasible of the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family . . .¹⁴⁶

The act relied on partnerships with private industry and local governments but offered funding both for demolition and for redevelopment, with the ultimate goal of lowering housing costs while improving housing standards. These goals were not always met, and urban renewal developed a reputation for being both expensive and heavy-handed in its demolition efforts.¹⁴⁷ Often, redeveloped housing was more expensive for residents and far removed from established gathering places and social networks.¹⁴⁸ As James Wilson noted in the introduction to a series of urban renewal essays from 1966,

¹⁴⁵ Nina Johnson and Jeffrey Tashman, "Urban Renewal in Oregon: History, Case Studies, Policy Issues, and Latest Developments," prepared for the Portland Development Commission on behalf of the Association of Oregon Redevelopment Agencies, 2002, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Housing Act of 1949, chapter 338, section 2, 63 Stat. 413, 42 USC Section 1441(1964), http://bulk.resource.org/gao.gov/81-171/00001EE4_595076.pdf [Accessed July 11, 2009].

¹⁴⁷ James Q. Wilson, ed. *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy*, (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1966).

¹⁴⁸ See Chapter 4, "Relocation and Community Life" in Wilson's *Urban Renewal* for an assessment of the social successes and failures associated with relocation, 291 – 380.

“Urban renewal is not the most expensive or the most far-reaching domestic governmental program of our time, yet it is one of the most widely-discussed and perhaps one of the most controversial.”¹⁴⁹

If that was the case in 1966, the same year the National Historic Preservation Act was passed—partly in response to excessive property loss due to urban redevelopment—the controversy only widened in future decades. African-Americans were especially critical, as they were often the first to be displaced in cities around the nation, and the last to find appropriate and affordable housing. William Grigsby, a planning professor with the University of Pennsylvania, discovered that the majority of substandard housing in the United States was actually located outside urban centers, but urban centers were the first to lose their housing stock to demolition. Grigsby also found that “Negro neighborhoods may have been the targets of redevelopment more often than white areas of like quality.”¹⁵⁰

When urban renewal finally did arrive in Eugene, Oregon, it had profound affects on downtown: “The early ‘slum clearance’ projects such as South Auditorium in Portland and Eugene downtown generated the most controversy because of the widespread displacement of residents and businesses and demolition of what some considered historically valuable buildings.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ James Q. Wilson, ed. *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy*, (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1966), xiii.

¹⁵⁰ William G. Grigsby, “Housing Markets and Public Policy” in *Urban Renewal: The Record and the Controversy* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1966), 30.

¹⁵¹ Johnson and Tashman, *Urban Renewal in Oregon*, 6.

Urban renewal in downtown Eugene led to the demolition of 112 buildings, but almost half the displaced businesses chose to relocate downtown.¹⁵² While urban renewal is remembered for having a devastating affect on Eugene's historic core, it did not officially have an impact on Ferry Street village, which had been demolished years before. However, Eugene's major urban renewal project downtown was not its only project. Recall the personal interviews with Lyllye Parker when she describes two other incidents in the post-Ferry Street period, where the black community was relocated for public projects: the Federal Building and the Campbell Senior Center.¹⁵³

The fact that urban renewal, which seems to have become an umbrella term in common use that encompasses all government-funded, big downtown redevelopment projects, has been used regularly to remove older urban buildings and especially those occupied by minority communities. This pattern might lead to the misconception that these neighborhoods were safe before urban renewal was conceived. Even if the demolition of the Ferry Street neighborhood, the forced relocation, and the redevelopment of the site were not related to urban renewal, the motives appear to have been the same: clear the land of substandard housing and redevelop it. The means appear to have been the same: demolish the buildings on site and relocate the residents. The results appear to have been the same: relocated families, regardless of race, lose some of their social networks, and are often relocated to housing that is both more expensive, and in the case of West 11th Street, not much more habitable.

¹⁵² Johnson and Tashman, *Urban Renewal in Oregon*, 21.

¹⁵³ Lyllye Parker's relocation narrative is reproduced in Chapter 2.

MOTIVES

Ferry Street homes were in the way of development, exactly as the homes of African-Americans were when highway redevelopment projects cleared aging urban neighborhoods in the 1950s and 60s, and when the Indianapolis campus of Purdue University destroyed its surrounding African-American neighborhood in the 1960s.¹⁵⁴ Why were African-American neighborhoods—those that were permanent parts of the landscape, as well as those, like Ferry Street, that appeared less permanent—so commonly razed? From the literature regarding urban renewal, it appears that “blight” became synonymous with poor, centrally located ethnic communities. Poor, centrally located, ethnic communities became synonymous with failing downtowns. Highway projects, along with other large redevelopment projects including university campuses, were economic catalysts and irresistibly attractive to city councils, understandably. Surely, once the Ferry Street buildings were cleared and the Ferry Street Bridge expanded, the dams in place and the land annexed to the city of Eugene, the site became a much more attractive location for economic development. Along the northern border of the Ferry Street site, where Willie Mims’ house once stood, a large car lot, with lots of parking, now sits (See Figure 4.6).

¹⁵⁴ Barbara J. Little, *Historical Archaeology: Why the Past Matters* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007), 114.



Figure 4.6: Willie Mims Surveys the Former Ferry Street Village Site
Willie stands on the site of his former house in the ad hoc Ferry Street Bridge community. In the distance are other commercial buildings that have sprung up in the decades since the community's homes were razed.

A mix of commercial uses site on the site today. To the south of the site is a duck pond and pleasant parklands. To the north are more commercial building and some residential developments (See Figure 4.7 below for location).

Barbara J. Little, in her book, *Historical Archaeology*, provides a number of examples of similar lost African-American neighborhoods. Some, like Freedman's Town in Houston, were simply eaten up by gentrification; others like New Philadelphia, were founded by freed slaves and did not survive once they were bypassed by the railroad, but

the case of Purdue is particularly relevant: “In Indiana in the 1960s, members of the local African American community were displaced when their neighborhood was razed as slum clearance to make way for the expansion of Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis. Much of the cleared land simply became parking lots, a fate that preserved much of the extensive archaeological record.”¹⁵⁵

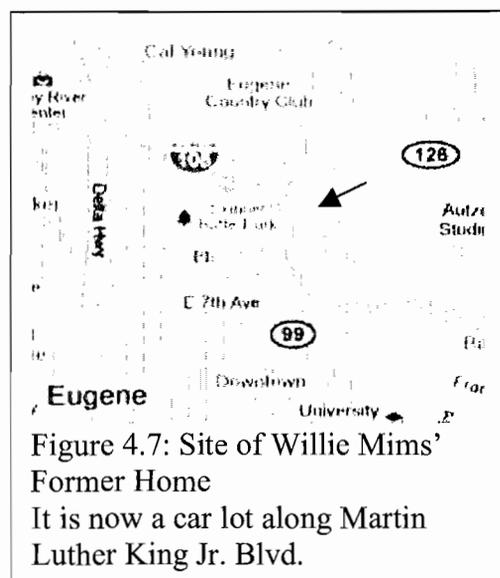


Figure 4.7: Site of Willie Mims' Former Home
It is now a car lot along Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.

The fact that paving and parking lots might preserve the archaeological record points to one of the first, and most promising steps of fully documenting and potentially commemorating Ferry Street. Like Purdue’s parking lots, the sites of some of the community’s houses are now under pavement, and might potentially yield archaeological artifacts. We might, therefore, be able to identify material culture associated with the Ferry Street community and commemorate what material remains on the site of the former neighborhood.

In the case of Purdue, archaeology was paired with oral history to provide a record of the lost neighborhood. Though this is a mitigating measure, and not as satisfying as the protection and preservation of the built environment would have been, it is a step toward acknowledging and honoring the lost history embedded in “repurposed”

¹⁵⁵ Barbara J. Little, *Historical Archaeology: Why the Past Matters* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2007), 114.

landscapes. As such, historical archaeology provides one of the most hopeful methods for commemoration at Ferry Street. It is considered in more detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER V

COMPARING APPROACHES TO COMMEMORATION

“Historians of black and other ethnic historic sites criticized the architectural history and preservation professionals for their unwillingness to designate sites with little pure architectural integrity or with no physical remains whatsoever.”¹⁵⁶

-- Antoinette Lee

If narratives are the vessels of cultural identity, than there is one primary resource that can be preserved from Ferry Street: the cultural memory of those who lived through the Ferry Street era, those who learned from it, and those who have worked for civil rights in Eugene ever since. The Ferry Street narrative is significant not only to African-Americans, but to the city of Eugene as a whole. Though it focuses on one small community, it is that community's relationship to the broader urban community that shapes the events of the Ferry Street village's birth and death. In hindsight, we can only preserve the resources we have (the documentary and oral historical evidence), and take responsibility for sharing that history with a broader audience so that, as the saying goes, we are not doomed to repeat it. We, therefore, turn our attention to models of commemoration, and analyze their potential applicability.

¹⁵⁶ Antoinette J. Lee, “Discovering Old Cultures in the New World: The Role of Ethnicity,” in *The American Mosaic: Preserving a Nation's Heritage*, ed. Robert E Stipe and Antoinette J. Lee (Washington D.C.: United States Committee International Council on Monuments and Sites, 1987), 202.

It is important to reiterate that Eugene's first informal black neighborhood is associated with important local people (the Mims and Reynolds families, elders among Eugene's contemporary African-American community), and significant trends (including housing and civil rights movements in Eugene that mirror those in the rest of the country), though the site lacks architectural integrity. For these reasons, an analysis of commemoration models may begin with familiar tools like the National Register of Historic Places, but cannot end with them. Numerous disciplines provide models for analysis and commemoration. Some, including historical archaeology, cultural landscape preservation, public history and folklore may be integrated into a site-specific interpretive plan for the Ferry Street settlement site. But when we ask ourselves who owns the narrative related to the Ferry Street Bridge, we must rely heavily on the memories of those who experienced it. It is, therefore, necessary to consider commemoration methods that include engagement with the elders of Eugene's African-American community, along with city planners, officials, and educators. From a survey of potential approaches, patterns emerge that hint at the most appropriate combination of tools and methodologies. From those, a series of recommendations and a plan for future research has been drawn. By examining like-minded fields and their models for commemoration, we see why a multi-disciplinary approach is not only preferable, but likely necessary.

Though a multi-disciplinary approach most clearly meets the needs of this site, it is appropriate to begin with an analysis of how the primary preservationist tool, the Secretary of the Interior's National Register of Historic Places, deals with sites similar to the Ferry Street village. As the most powerful, well-known, and respected inventory of

historic sites, it is often the first method of commemoration considered by preservationists.

THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

The National Register of Historic Places grew out of the ground-breaking National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, which responded to a national call for a preservation effort meeting four main goals:¹⁵⁷

1. Develop an expansive inventory of properties reflecting the full range of the national heritage
2. Provide a mechanism to protect those properties from unnecessary harm caused by federal activities
3. Develop a program of financial incentives, embracing both grants and tax incentives, to encourage the preservation of non-federally owned historic properties
4. Convene an independent federal preservation body to coordinate the actions of federal agencies affecting historic preservation

While these four goals formed the basics of the resulting NHPA, it is appropriate to note what is missing. While the first goal was to inventory properties reflecting the full range of our national heritage, the current inventory is still in the process of meeting that

¹⁵⁷ Summary of recommendations from the federal report, *With Heritage So Rich*, borrowed from Robert E. Stipe, ed. *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 35.

goal. While the National Park Service is working towards parity, its criteria for integrity could limit the potential for sites of invisible history to receive national commemoration through listing in the National Register. The Act's second goal limits its scope to preventing only those harmful activities resulting from federal actions. This leaves open opportunities for other forms of harmful activities, including those by local governments, as long as they are not funded by federal dollars. It also leaves private property owners free to do what they like with their own historic properties. None of these worthy goals include standing in the way of demolition.

However, the resulting National Historic Preservation Act provides for an inventory of nationally relevant buildings, sites and artifacts that strive to reflect the whole of our heritage, and the National Park Service is actively engaged in expanding its list of ethnically distinct resources. It provides one of the few means by which such a site might be considered for either documentation or commemoration. The National Register of Historic Places acknowledges four separate categories of "significance" for which a property may be listed:

- A: Association with historic events, activities or trends
- B: Association with important persons
- C: Distinctive style or physical characteristics
- D: Potential to provide important information about prehistory or history

As stated in the NPS bulletin related to the National Register, "a property must meet at least one of the criteria for listing. Integrity must also be evident through historic

qualities including location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association.”¹⁵⁸

These aspects of integrity are the defining factors, along with historical significance, in a property’s eligibility for the National Register. They are the most important roadblocks to commemoration for sites like Ferry Street. If we say that Ferry Street’s period of significance encompasses the last half of the 1940s, then we must show that the site, its buildings or other defining features retain integrity from that era. Traditionally, preservationists apply this requirement to historic buildings, noting significant workmanship, that the building sits on its original site, retains its roof timbers and original cladding, its link to historic events or people, and still presents its authentic character, communicating a feeling of authenticity. Based on their integrity and their historical significance, homes and public buildings are regularly added to the national inventory as fine examples of our American heritage.

In the case of Ferry Street, as noted, no such integrity of aboveground resources exists. The materials that made up the houses and the chapel, the craftsmanship of the builders, design elements that may have defined the community’s distinct character have all been lost. The site certainly retains nothing of the feeling of an African-American neighborhood. When Willie C. Mims visited the site, walking across the paved car lot that now sits atop the site of his and his neighbors’ houses, he had to guess at their

¹⁵⁸ National Park Service, “How to Complete the National Register Nomination Form” (U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, undated) www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb16a/nrb16a_intro.htm [accessed August 6, 2009].

original locations.¹⁵⁹ However, Willie was able to identify five landscape features that remain and they may be relevant to landscape preservation models.

The reconstructed Ferry Street Bridge still looms over the former site of the Ferry Street homes; it is, however, a newer, wider version of the bridge that once stood as a beacon within sight of all the Ferry Street neighbors. The second feature, Martin Luther King Blvd., which runs north of the neighborhood site, appears to run along its original path, and was once known as Centennial Blvd. and as Patterson Road before that. The street was renamed after Dr. King late in the 20th Century in spite of protests from some local businesses. The third and fourth features are perhaps the most authentic. A slough that once served as a dumpsite for a neighborhood rendering plant still exists. It is now a small waterway running behind a restaurant. The fourth feature, an unimproved road with undeveloped shoulders, is the most mysterious. Day Island Road still crosses from the Ferry Street Bridge area to Springfield, traversing the tall grasses of Alton Baker Park that separate the two cities. Willie remembers it much as it is today, winding unobtrusively through the landscape. The grounds around the riverbank where Willie and his friends used to play have now been meticulously landscaped and claimed by Alton Baker Park. The park post-dates the Ferry Street community and was named after the founder of *The Eugene Register-Guard*. In the park, Baker and his supporters are commemorated as local ecologists who wanted to share the lovely riverbank with their fellow Eugeniens. There is no mention on the signage of the community that once claimed the site as their own. The fifth element is the most substantial: the Willamette

¹⁵⁹ Willie C. Mims, during a visit to the Ferry Street site with the author, May 2009.

River. The site still retains its pastoral, intimate relationship with the banks of the Willamette River, which both defined the city's boundaries and provided a means of industry.

These significant landscape features might help the Ferry Street site meet the requirements of the National Register of Historic Places as a significant historic landscape or place. Interestingly, the intangible history of this site is still significant under all but one of the criteria for inclusion.

- A: The site is closely associated with African-American history as it relates to the national movement for housing and employment equality. Currently, the City of Eugene is documenting and preparing to educate the community on Eugene's own battle against housing discrimination.
- B: The former neighborhood is closely linked to Eugene's original African-American families. These early families and friends helped Eugene establish and support a Civil Rights movement of its own. Currently, the remaining members of the founding families are still close. Many worked together in the 1960s for greater equality through groups like the Congress on Racial Equality.
- C: The site cannot be said to have architectural significance.
- D: The site could potentially yield important archaeological information. Its landscape, while disturbed by redevelopment, may yet retain artifacts from the 1940s, artifacts that could answer key questions still associated with the site. Since portions of the site have not supported residential development since the

Ferry Street families were relocated, artifacts could be traced to the riverbank community, even if they could not be tied to any one cultural group.

The site does fail to meet criterion C: Distinctive architectural style. This study does not advocate for a reconstruction of lost buildings. Though it would be ideal to interpret and experience a site like the Reynolds' authentic juke joint, preservationists prefer not to create a false sense of history.

Ferry Street is neither the first nor the most important site to have lost evidence of its rich African-American history. The National Park Service has grappled with commemoration for decades and there are multiple examples of properties that have been added to the inventory in spite of their lack of aboveground resources. One example, from Ned Kaufman's needs assessment, is the town of Eatonville, which is both the "oldest, and most in-tact example of a black town established during the Reconstruction period"¹⁶⁰ and the former home of author Zora Neal Hurston. After a decade of trying to negotiate a successful nomination to the National Register, explains Kaufman, a folklorist was invited to document the town's unique lifeways, focusing on culturally defining features of life in Eatonville. As this work continued, the town was successfully added to the National Register for its unique cultural contributions to our shared American heritage.

¹⁶⁰ Kaufman, *Needs Assessment*, 26.

CULTURAL LANDSCAPES

As Ferry Street would fail to meet standards for the integrity of its built resources, it is appropriate to examine other NPS programs that may offer some protection or opportunities for treatment and interpretation. One of the most promising models appears in the National Park Service's cultural resources management policies, which acknowledge the value of a distinct type of resource that may encompass a site like Ferry Street. The NPS has a policy for the preservation of "cultural landscapes," which are defined broadly as "a reflection of human adaptation and use of natural resources and is often expressed in the way land is organized and divided, patterns of settlement, land use, systems of circulation, and the types of structures that are built."¹⁶¹ While Ferry Street, during its era of significance, was a landscape encompassing specific uses, patterns of settlement, and systems of circulation, these landscape characteristics, like the original structures, have lost integrity over time. However, scholars like Catherine Howett have examined the cultural landscape preservation movement and discovered that there has always been a great deal of flexibility related to a cultural landscape's integrity:

As it turns out, what the National Park Service understands by integrity really does have to do with the unity, completeness, or soundness of the resource being evaluated: Bulletin 16A advises that integrity is 'the authenticity of a property's historic identity, evidenced by the survival of physical characteristics that existed during the property's prehistoric or historic period.'¹⁶²

Practitioners have likewise found that the National Park Service often takes into

¹⁶¹ National Parks Service, *Bulletin 28: Cultural Resource Management Guideline* (Washington D.C: National Park Service, 1998), 87.

¹⁶² Catherine Howett, "Integrity as a Value in Cultural Landscape Preservation," *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America*, ed. Dolores Hayden (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 189.

account that change occurs to landscapes over time. The fact that landscapes are made up of living things insists upon this flexibility. To identify the character of a significant landscape, the NPS offers further guidance: “The character of a cultural landscape is defined both by physical materials, such as roads, buildings, walls, and vegetation, and by use reflecting cultural values and traditions.”¹⁶³ While the NPS has prepared guidelines related to this special category of landscapes, the practice of nominating and preserving them is still evolving. As Cari Goetchus mentions in her article, “Cultural Landscapes and the National Register,” terminology and policy are still in need of refinement as defining significance for these sites, which include tangible and intangible resources, is fairly challenging. The NPS has sought to further divide cultural landscapes into four categories, which Goetchus cogently describes as: “historic sites (e.g., presidential homes, battlefields), historic designed landscapes (e.g., urban plazas, formal estate gardens), historic regional landscapes (e.g., farmsteads, ranches), and ethnographic landscapes (e.g., Native American, African American, Scandinavian American landscapes).”¹⁶⁴ Though these definitions appear promising, and could easily encompass a site like Ferry Street, the policy for preservation, as developed and defined by the NPS, appears to be most applicable to those landscapes already within its holdings. Currently, the NPS is researching and documenting landscapes of cultural significance over which it already has jurisdiction, as the significant characteristics of these landscapes have traditionally been overlooked.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Cari Goetchus, “Cultural Landscapes and the National Register” in *CRM*, no. 1, 2002, 24-25.

A similar process of research and documentation is taking place outside the park system and guidelines are in place to preserve cultural landscapes not owned by the federal government. It is unclear whether the Ferry Street village currently retains enough integrity to qualify. While change over time is an accepted characteristic of a culturally significant landscape, the NPS expects those changes to occur in service of the site's significance and use. For instance, if a farm landscape is culturally significant, it may retain integrity even if its crops have changed, or the boundaries have been expanded, or the roads have been altered. Regardless of these changes, the farm would retain its association with its traditional, historic use. Again, Ferry Street suffers from the eradication of its community and the extensive alteration of the landscape. Its uses have changed utterly.

Further research would be necessary to determine whether the Ferry Street site might be eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under the designation of a culturally significant landscape. It does retain two significant roads, its association with the Ferry Street Bridge, and its location in association with the riverbank, which once formed the city limit. Though it lacks visible references to its period of significance, it joins a key body of preservation-worthy sites with similar characteristics.

TRADITIONAL CULTURAL PROPERTIES

The National Park Service recognizes another class of landscape that embodies great cultural significance but little visible evidence. "Traditional cultural properties"

encompass resources such as those held sacred by Native American tribal groups, including burial grounds and sacred spaces in need of preservation and protection.

According to an NPS Bulletin,

‘Traditional’ in this context refers to those beliefs, customs, and practices of a living community of people that have been passed down through the generations, usually orally or through practice. The traditional cultural significance of a historic property, then, is significance derived from the role the property plays in a community's historically rooted beliefs, customs, and practices.¹⁶⁵

This also potentially opens doors for Ferry Street’s inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, though it is questionable whether a case can be made for the site as a place where historically rooted beliefs, customs and practices are embodied or practiced, given the lack of site evidence to support such a claim. Integrity is still a consideration, even for properties not evaluated for their built forms. If Eugene’s African-American community no longer accesses the site as a culturally-specific landscape, it likely lacks this type of integrity as well. Further consultation with the original Ferry Street families may be necessary for such an option to be seriously considered. Without a public desire for commemoration, the site is simply a former neighborhood. If, however, it is claimed and cherished for its significant place in the history of Eugene’s black community, it achieves a new level of importance and offers new opportunities for public education.

Though this is one criterion that applies to the value a cultural group places on a site, it is also one that acknowledges change over time: “Even if a property has lost integrity as a possible traditional cultural property, it may retain integrity with reference

¹⁶⁵ Patricia L. Parker and Thomas F. King, *National Register Bulletin: Guidelines for Evaluating Traditional Cultural Properties* (Washington D.C.: National Park Service, 1998).

to some other aspect of significance. For example, a property whose cultural significance has been lost through disturbance may still retain archeological deposits of significance for their information content.”¹⁶⁶

INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

Though this study regularly refers to intangible history and intangible heritage, these terms have particular definitions under the National Park Service guidelines for the National Register of Historic Places. And because intangible historic resources are a concern outside the boundaries of the United States, this is a term that has taken on international significance.

“Heritage” is defined by the National Park Service as “the people’s stories, myths and symbols located in our collective memory. Heritage is comprised of our philosophy, values, ethics and morality, beliefs that are embodied in our national, local and family heroes whom we commemorate in expressive art forms, cultural performances, and ceremonies.”¹⁶⁷ But the NPS also claims that the definition of heritage has changed considerably in recent years, growing ever broader to encompass the many ways we preserve, share and express our cultural identities: “Today, the notion of heritage is an open one, which can develop new objects and put forward new meanings as it reflects

¹⁶⁶ Patricia L. Parker and Thomas F. King, *Guidelines for Evaluating and Documenting Traditional Cultural Properties* (NPS: National Register Bulletin), www.nps.gov/history/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb38/ [Accessed August 6, 2009].

¹⁶⁷ National Park Service, *What is Heritage?* (NPS: Africa-American Heritage and Ethnography), www.nps.gov/history/ethnography/aah/AAheritage/keyconcepts_furthrdg3.htm [Accessed August 6, 2009].

living culture rather than an ossified image of the past.”¹⁶⁸

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has recently defined “intangible cultural heritage” as manifested in the following domains: Oral traditions, including languages performing arts, including dance, music and theater, social practices, rituals and events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, as well as traditional craftsmanship.¹⁶⁹

While these definitions of intangible resources may apply broadly to the mythology related to the Ferry Street village site, they do not define the site itself, which is tangible, and perhaps the best resource that remain to tell the story of Ferry Street’s evolution, and by extension, Eugene’s social evolution.

While these various preservation models may, in consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office, yield a potential nomination to the National Register of Historic Places, there is yet one more possibility that deserves greater attention: Criterion D: “the potential to provide important information about prehistory or history.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ United Nations Education, Science and Education Organization, “What Is Intangible Cultural Heritage?” (UNESCO: Intangible Cultural Heritage), <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002> [Accessed July 28, 2009].

¹⁷⁰ See Jan Townsend, *Archeology and the National Register* (Washington D.C.: National Park Service, 1995) for the history of the Historic Preservation Act and the inclusion of Criteria D.

ARCHAEOLOGY

Criterion D is generally understood to refer to archaeological opportunities. While the Ferry Street village site may hold prehistoric material as well, ideally, historic artifacts could tell us something about the life of this short-lived community. Eloquently defined as “the study of past peoples based on the things they left behind and the ways they left their imprint on the world,”¹⁷¹ by noted historical archaeologist James Deetz, archaeology has split into various specialties. Historical archaeology concerns itself specifically with the post-literate age, and takes into account the global nature of information, recognizing that once ships arrived from Europe, the story of culture became a story of melded cultures. And when the written record is incorporated into a study, the potential for a more complete understanding of past cultures is greatly heightened.

Under this umbrella, the Ferry Street site does hold some potential. Because there was no indoor plumbing for the Ferry Street villagers, the site included a number of privies. While their locations are no longer visible on the surface of the land, their associated pits, which likely exist under fill, could potentially yield a number of significant artifacts. This is why archaeologists prize privies: as waste disposal sites, they tend to yield evidence of consumption through the distribution of seeds and other food waste; they often acted as secondary dumpsites and may include ceramics, glass and other domestic artifacts; and they are often associated with a single habitation site,

¹⁷¹ James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 4.

making ties to specific people or family groups more likely.¹⁷² Could those privy sites be located at Ferry Street and excavated, archaeologists may find evidence that contributes to a narrative of lifeways in the village and that adds to the information already available in the public record. Other clues may exist throughout the site: construction materials and foundation footprints, personal tableware, clothing or toiletry items.¹⁷³ Bottles, jars and apothecary items, as well as furnishings and butchered bone could help recreate an image of how the village functioned, providing a link to a specific era and a set of cultural practices that have since been blurred or lost. Examples of similar excavations are integral to the interpretation of African-American history that currently exists in our national parks.

For instance, the George Washington Carver National Monument commemorates the young life of Carver, one of the most successful agricultural pioneers of his age.¹⁷⁴ According to the National Park Service, the only building standing at the site of the park that is original to Carver's era is the house of Moses and Susan Carver, slave-owners who built the cabin in which their slave, Mary, gave birth to George Washington Carver. Though nothing of the slave cabin was visible aboveground, archaeologists were able to discover the site of the cabin and retrieve artifacts from the era of occupation. The outline

¹⁷² While all archaeologists may prize the privy, their specific benefits became clear during lectures by Rick Minor, professional archaeologist and adjunct professor with the University of Oregon.

¹⁷³ While countless sources analyze archaeological practices, James Deetz and Barbara J. Little provide excellent theoretical and practical analysis of historical archaeology and its relationship to historic preservation. See Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: An Archaeology of Early American Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1996) and Little, *Historical Archaeology: Why the Past Matters* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007).

¹⁷⁴ National Park Service, George Washington Carver National Monument, Missouri, www.nps.gov/gwca/index.html [Accessed July 9, 2009].

of the original 12 x 12 cabin was then marked by a few feet of plank wall replicating the outline of the cabin on its original site. A stone on the site announces the establishment of the national landmark, dated 1943.

Examples like this show that the National Park Service has taken the opportunity to commemorate national figures, even when the most important aboveground resources no longer exist. It also shows how valuable historical archaeology can be in documenting and authenticating details like the exact location of a building—something which would be highly valuable at the site of the Ferry Street community.

The coupling of historic preservation and historical archaeology is hardly a new idea. Professionals like Alan Jabbour, former director of American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, have already noted that the preservation fields, of which historic preservation is only one, have continued to expand until their boundaries are indistinct and their collaborations a professional, as well as a legal, mandate.

The historic preservation movement steadily expanded its purview as the twentieth century unfolded. There was a broadening of the view of what should be preserved, and a no-less-important expansion of the contexts within which to regard the objects to be preserved... The expansion of the purview of historic preservation was paralleled by the broadening of the field of archaeology, which had become linked to historic preservation not only by federal law and governmental activities but also by the logic of coherent fieldwork.¹⁷⁵

The Ferry Street village site was surveyed in the 1990s by a Eugene archaeology firm, Heritage Research Associates, Inc, which was performing an excavation on the western side of the Ferry Street Bridge, the side opposite the 1940s village. According to Rick Minor, senior archaeologist with Heritage Research Associates, the company

¹⁷⁵ Alan Jabour, "Folklife, Intangible Heritage, and the Promise and Perils of Cultural Cooperation," in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 432.

presented artifacts from the western side of the bridge to the State Historic Preservation Office, but the artifact assemblage was not considered significant enough for the excavation and reporting to continue. Therefore, the artifacts from the excavation have not yet been analyzed and cataloged. We cannot yet know whether artifacts gathered from the west side of the bridge might provide some insight into the history on the east side of the bridge.

Asked whether an excavation of the Ferry Street village could yield new information about the 1940s settlement, Rick Minor replied that with the help of former residents who might be able to locate potentially rich deposits, including privies or building foundations, on the landscape, a study could potentially yield some new information. It would be much harder to locate potentially rich sites without such assistance from former residents.

Rick Minor estimated, unofficially, that the site could be surveyed within a five-day workweek for approximately \$10,000. However, a partnership with the city would be necessary for such work to begin, as the lands would have to be returned to their current condition after excavation.

BEYOND THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Any of these categories of protected resources could potentially encompass the Ferry Street village site. Further consultation with State Historic Preservation Officer and the National Park Service would be necessary, as well as with former residents, who

would likely need to take a lead role in interpreting the site. Other lost neighborhoods have been kept alive in memory and through the establishment of plaques and public education projects because of the efforts of former residents.¹⁷⁶

However, Ferry Street, for all its cultural signifiers, does not perfectly fit the criteria for any of these commemoration approaches. Commemoration through the National Register is not to be rejected, but the previous material is presented as support for a more multi-disciplinary approach. The example of Zora Neal Hurston's Eatonville, mentioned previously, provides a model for the kind of inter-disciplinary partnership that might contribute to a commemorative plan for Ferry Street. Through the combined effort of many fields, a plan might emerge that is tailored specifically to the importance of the "cultural memory" associated with the Ferry Street village.

PLACE STUDIES

In Jabbour's statements, quoted above, what ties disciplines like historic preservation, historical archaeology and landscape preservation together is their respect for a particular concept: the power of place. As Yi-Fu Tan, one of the originators of "place studies" explains, "When space feels thoroughly familiar to us, it has become place."¹⁷⁷ This concept of "place," infused with cultural associations, has come center

¹⁷⁶ Vanport, a lost African-American neighborhood in Portland, is a prime example. The site is the location of annual picnics attended by former residents. Through this act of community, the site's significance and its memory are celebrated.

¹⁷⁷ This is the quote that opened Barbara E. Mann's *A Place in History*, which deals more specifically with Jewish history and preservation (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 1.

stage in the 21st century historic preservation movement. A concept broad enough to encompass architecture, landscape, culture and craft, “place” has become the common denominator among resources and sites preserved for their historic significance. As such, it has the power to unite other preservation forces in answering questions like those posed by ethnic groups who don’t find themselves reflected in the contemporary preservation surveys. As Antoinette J. Lee says,

Many members of ethnic groups... want to manage their own cultural heritage. For example, surveys of cultural resources often fall into two major categories: architectural and archaeological. Where does ethnic and social history fall when the surviving historic properties are neither architectural nor archaeological sites? Many ethnic groups think that their cultural heritage is thus undervalued when left to preservation professionals.¹⁷⁸

As other scholars have suggested, the National Register created a kind of consensus amongst professionals about what is preservation-worthy, but that consensus began to break down with new scholarship on vernacular studies, the new social history movement, place studies and a new interest in ethnic architectural design. “Thirty years ago, when the National Register was first expanded to accept properties of state and local significance there was a shared, almost intuitive understanding among a relatively small population about what was important: large, high-style houses, and places associated with national heroes and events of politics and war.”¹⁷⁹ This definition of “important” has changed in recent years as sites of significance to women and other underrepresented groups have received greater recognition. This changed the nature of even the most

¹⁷⁸ Lee, “Social and Ethnic Dimensions,” 397.

¹⁷⁹ Elizabeth Lyon and Richard Cloues, “The Cultural and Historical Mosaic and the Concept of Significance,” *Preservation of What For Whom?: A Critical Look at Historical Significance* (National Council for Preservation Education, 1999) 226.

familiar of preservation models: the house museum. Along with the childhood homes of great men, the public gained new access to small, cramped tenement homes, as mentioned previously, through the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York. Similarly, Ellis Island was interpreted with an eye toward the immigrant experience, the trials and the struggles of starting a new life in the United States. Other examples have made their way into preservation literature, including the interpretation of Historic Williamsburg, which has begun to recreate slave auctions for contemporary audiences so as to treat the most difficult of American history honestly. The same inclusive spirit has changed the nature of interpretation at Thomas Jefferson's famous home, Monticello, which no longer depicts the site as one significant individual's residence, but as a system of social and cultural forces, which relied deeply on the injustices of slavery.

This willingness to look at the ugly and the practical evils of early American life has led to the recognition of sites that tell a new story. Ferry Street is one of those sites that contributes a counter-narrative to Eugene's own personal history of growth, industry and prosperity.

From the field of place studies, Ferry Street gains its significance not just as a former neighborhood but as a unique collection of associations and meanings. As Henri LeFebvre taught us, space is a discourse, a product of forces that can be read and decoded. Ferry Street tells, among others, the narrative of cultural demolition.

A combined emphasis on the power of places and on the social history embodied within them presents preservation models that do not freeze places in time but celebrates their roles in cultural evolution. Local historians Mark Harris and Cheri Turpin have

suggested that the Ferry Street site would make an excellent site for a permanent museum installation focusing on the evolution of Eugene's African-American community. They envision interactive computer terminals that allow the visitor to access oral histories or other resources that bring the site to life. Eugene currently has no African-American museum, but its institutions, including the Lane County Archives and the local and university libraries have access to a great collection of interpretive materials.

FOLKLORE

In the fall of 2008, Professor John Fenn began a project with his students at the University of Oregon that drew on his experiences with folklore and the performance of public history. With recorders and cameras, his students fanned out into Eugene and produced oral histories with key members of Eugene's African-American community. These histories were better understood when black professors, elders and others visited the classroom and told stories of their own personal experiences. From these encounters, a body of evidence emerged that forms the basis for an evolving public history project. This work has already led to a number of outcomes: the oral histories have been transcribed and added to the university's extensive archives; the students have examined models for sharing this history with the broader community through a series of classroom symposia; and one student produced a video made on-site that discusses the power of invisible history.

These various efforts were not only educational but the beginning of a

commemoration process that assumes public participation outside the academic environment. The students identified a number of guiding principles for the future project: the African-American community must be central to any public commemoration, they decided, and any theatrical readings or performances must be staged publicly to bring this history to a broader audience. They also agreed that education should be a central component, in which case, schools and schoolchildren should have access to this material.

While this work is ongoing, it utilizes tools from various fields and provides a model for interdisciplinary commemoration. In the future, Fenn hopes to host an open call at the Eugene Public Library, inviting anyone who might have an experience with Eugene and its history throughout the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s to share in a public memory project that can perhaps add depth and breadth to our understanding of the evolution of Eugene's experience of race.

Folklore is a particularly useful partner in public commemoration because its practitioners are skilled at taking the various narratives that define folklore, isolating them from the rest of human experience, recording them, analyzing them and, in the case of Eugene, Oregon, sharing their analysis with the public.¹⁸⁰ This provides a means of reconstructing history, indexing socio-cultural processes or tracking the socialization and political education of social groups.¹⁸¹ As Michael Owen Jones, says in *Putting Folklore to Use*, "Folklorists, like many anthropologists, are able to bridge communication gaps

¹⁸⁰ Michael Owen Jones, "Applying Folklore Studies: An Introduction," in *Putting Folklore to Use* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1994), 25.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

created by cultural differences.”¹⁸² While Eugene has evolved past its segregated 1940s culture, a review of recent newspaper accounts, and conversations with contemporary Africa-Americans show that while Eugene is home to many successful, powerful and well-respected members of various cultural groups, racism is still prevalent, as is a sense that race-related culture is difficult to maintain in a community that is still primarily white.

Folklorists, as analyzers of culture, could help guide an inclusive, mutually-supportive public process that creates a commemoration plan that honors its elders and provides hope for a more just future.

MODELS FROM WOMEN’S HISTORY

Women have been advocating for an equal role in the preservation and interpretation of our historic resources for generations. In recent years, clever, multi-disciplinary models have emerged, showing how a variety of approaches working in tandem can present a rich, commemorative model. One excellent example is the Bidy Mason project in Los Angeles, which transformed the known details related to an African-American midwife’s life into a series of public art projects. As Dolores Hayden has said in relation to the Bidy Mason project, “A working woman of color is the ideal subject for a public history project because in her life all the struggles associated with

¹⁸² Jones, *Applying Folklore*, 27.

class, ethnicity and gender are intertwined.”¹⁸³ In Hayden’s work, she calls the Bidly Mason project “experimental... combining public history and public art to commemorate an African American midwife’s homestead with no historic structure remaining.”¹⁸⁴ A five-part model emerged: An artist’s installation was placed in the elevator lobby of a new building on the site; photomurals complimented an assemblage of associated artifacts. A second artist created a large format letterpress book, which incorporated rubbings from the cemetery where Mason is buried and a history of her life. A poster was created that focused on Mason’s life as a midwife, an enormous poured-concrete wall integrated Mason’s timeline with the urban development of Los Angeles. Finally, a book and journal commemorated the entire project.

Though this is only one example of the productive output from partnerships between artists and historians, it is instructive in that it incorporated historic material into a new redevelopment project and tied the life of its subject directly into the history of place, producing, as Hayden explains, a single person’s story that can tell the story of a whole city.

From this model, future commemorators of Ferry Street will hopefully find inspiration for shared projects of public art and public history. While Ferry Street lacks remaining material culture, it is rich in social meaning and in biographical information related to the key women and men who lived there.

¹⁸³ Dolores Hayden, “The Power of Place Project: Claiming Women’s History in the Urban Landscape” in *Restoring Women’s History Through Historic Preservation*, ed. Gail Lee Dubrow & Jennifer B. Goodman (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003) 206.

¹⁸⁴ Hayden, “Power of Place,” 203.

CITY PLANNING

Though preservationists work closely with government officials, engage with state historic preservation offices, local planning commissions, heritage groups and local museums and archives, we should completely engage city officials in the heritage plans for sites of important cultural history related to place.

City planning has become an increasingly progressive field. “Smart growth” principles have dominated urban development goals in Oregon for decades, and they call for an urban design process that is, at its heart, public. City planners regularly engage community members, making use of the great variety of their experiences and expertise, and drawing on their collective vision to make important public decisions. What the field contributes to a plan for Ferry Street is this concept of shared responsibility and shared vision. The City of Eugene would, under this model, acknowledge that the history of Ferry Street is actually integral to the history of Eugene. As such, it is not significant to a small population of residents but to all of us. With this acknowledgement, the City would be able to launch a public process for commemoration, possibly through the use of charrettes and other planning tools that actively engage the public in decision-making.

Cities regularly memorialize historic events that inspire pride. Eugene has statues to its founder and to its local heroes, including author Ken Kesey, and numerous university and public activities acknowledge important citizens and important eras of Eugene’s development. This interest in public communication has already encompassed the Ferry Street site. Students at Lane Community College have used a kind of performance art theory to pitch a large tent on the site of the Ferry Street community and

invite visitors to engage with educational materials that tell the story. Though these temporary activities hold great educational potential for those students involved, they soon disappear from the landscape. This is ephemeral art, after all. Their impermanence does not fully meet the needs of a commemorative plan for Ferry Street. To achieve such commemoration, a public process including officials, residents and academics would likely achieve a permanent and prideful memorial.

Though a number of theoretical and practical models can be considered, this study culls from all these possibilities a set of priorities that both acknowledge the value of the single existing resource left from the resettlement era and opens the door for more creative methods of commemoration.

CHAPTER VI

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a deep relationship among such diverse activities as the preservation of Mount Vernon, the contemporary revival of Appalachian oldtime string-band music, the nomination process for the National Register of Historic places, a religious revitalization movement among Native Americans, and a Nevada buckaroo' living room museum of traditional cowboy gear... If all these activities may appropriately be called 'preservation,' then it is useful to consider what we usually call 'historic preservation' side by side with these other forms of the preservation impulse. Historic preservation, in this light, may be seen as one important facet of a many-faceted cultural process.¹⁸⁵

-- Alan Jabour

A many-faceted cultural awareness is exactly what is needed to produce a commemorative plan for the Ferry Street village site. Through a review of various preservation models, including those that incorporate public art and public action, it appears that Ferry Street has numerous opportunities for commemoration: It could be considered a historic site and, therefore, an important cultural landscape; or it could be considered a narrative, full of cultural memory, and therefore could be commemorated as part of our intangible cultural heritage; or it could be excavated and its archaeological

¹⁸⁵ Alan Jabour, "Folklife, Intangible Heritage, and the Promise and Perils of Cultural Cooperation," in *A Richer Heritage: Historic Preservation in the Twenty-First Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 422.

record could provide enough material evidence to support a commemorative monument on site, perhaps on the exact site of one of the homes or the former Ferry Street Chapel; or it could become the central narrative of a public commemoration process, one that brings partners together to celebrate Eugene's evolving relationship to race and class. Finally, it could inspire pieces of public art that turn the details of Ferry Street's evolution into examples of artistic expression.

If any of these models are preferred by the residents of Eugene, and especially by the former residents of the Ferry Street village, they should head a list of recommendations. Until that public conversation begins, this study presents a set of recommendations based on a set of core beliefs: The Ferry Street Bridge site is a significant cultural landscape in the city's history of race relations. The village's former residents deserve commemoration for settling in Eugene and working for social justice. The site retains cultural significance not only to the African-American community that forms and reforms the cultural memory that defines the site's significance, but for Eugene residents who are willing to embrace difficult and complex elements of social history in order to continue to evolve. Within this context, the author presents a series of recommendations to begin a future conversation on the history of the Ferry Street village, and on its future.

A FIVE-PART PLAN FOR COMMEMORATION

1. The first step in a full preservation and commemoration plan should focus on the completion of an archaeological survey of the Ferry Street site, bore testing to analyze the potential value of the archaeological record, and then an excavation of the site to determine the location of structures, traffic patterns, and artifacts. All artifacts should be preserved for future display.
2. While the archaeological excavation is underway, oral histories and other ethnographic documentation should continue. While Ferry Street no longer has a cohesive community coexisting on a single site, the families that lived there maintained their cultural ties, even after relocation. The ties that held these families together appear, from oral histories, to relate to three main focuses:
 - A. The church, which was founded by Ferry Street's first families and has maintained its congregation. Though, with the passing of the elder generation, the church has lost its weekly service, it still holds services on a semi-regular biweekly schedule, and the church building continues to be a gathering place for community events associated with the first families. It was constructed in 1949 in the middle of the West 11th Ave. settlement site, the primary location for families relocated from Ferry Street.
 - B. Shared cultural heritage as embodied in the story of the Ferry Street community, its formation, its independence and its demolition
 - C. A commitment to advancing civil rights for future generations

While researchers from the University of Oregon have achieved excellent access to the remaining member of Ferry Street's founding generation, and good to excellent access to local members of Ferry Street's second generation, other families who experienced Eugene in the 1940s and 50s have left town. By locating them and adding their remembrances to the historic record, we can continue to gain a deeper understanding of Eugene's cultural evolution. Access to second-generation family members appears to improve over time. Lyllye Parker recently noted that her remaining family members are considering writing the family's history; she also engaged two of her siblings in recent interviews, in spite of their earlier reluctance to participate. It would likely take a more concerted and long-term effort to amass and analyze oral history material from each living former resident. However, such work is vitally important to retaining the remaining history of Ferry Street. The more time passes, the fewer members of this small community remain.

3. While research and documentation continues, special attention should be paid to designing an inclusive public process for commemoration. Any resulting project, be it a plaque, a piece of public art, or a national park, should take into account both the experiences and the emotional and psychological effects of this history on Eugene's African-American community. With access to their history, each of us, regardless of race, class or gender, has a new opportunity to learn. But far too commonly, these projects are put forth and managed by outsiders who admire their research subjects and seek to share the lessons inherent in their stories. Though this may be well intentioned, any number of scholars can point to the potential for usurping and changing the

meaning of history. Therefore, in an ideal public process, something like the charrette or some other means of public brainstorming would allow for a broad range of opinions and allow the former Ferry Street community to maintain ownership by relating their view of local history and determining what form commemoration should take.

In similar cases, acts of commemoration have become highly personal. Former residents of Vanport, a disbanded Portland community, commemorate their history by meeting on the site for reunions. A similar method is employed at Buttermilk Bottom, a former African-American community that was absorbed into the city of Atlanta. There, former residents, along with a now defunct artists' collective called REPOhistory, reclaimed portions of the landscape by adding signage and plaques to the front yards of private citizens who were significant to the evolution of Buttermilk Bottom.¹⁸⁶ The site also hosts annual reunions for families and friends.

REPOhistory provides another model for public commemoration. The group had as its goal "To retrieve and relocate absent historical narratives at specific locations in the New York City area through counter-monuments, actions, and events. The work is informed by a multicultural re-reading of history, which focuses on issues of race, gender, class and sexuality."¹⁸⁷ In that spirit, the group helped create public art with and for the former residents of Buttermilk Bottom. This was art that relied on personal histories to create and interpret new public narratives.

A similar mix of private gathering and public art may appeal to former members

¹⁸⁶ Matthew Pottleiger and Jamie Purinton, *Landscape Narratives: Design Practices for Telling Stories* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 99-100.

¹⁸⁷ "Who Was REPOhistory?," www.repohistory.org/who.html [Accessed July 9, 2009].

of Ferry Street and their younger family members. Such an effort would perhaps meet some of the social needs of those who felt a sense of loss when their community was disbanded. As Willie Mims remembers, he would walk from his house on High Street south through Eugene to 11th Ave, and then a couple miles down 11th Ave to reach the new home of his childhood friends, boys he'd played with daily at Ferry Street. An opportunity to reconnect with families who have since left the area might provide Eugene's African-American community with some of the cohesion members say they miss.

4. As Eugene's oldest black church, and as the oldest remaining building associated with Eugene's first black community, St. Mark's Christian Methodist Episcopal Church should be considered for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places. Though it sits outside the defined scope of this study, this building appears to meet Criteria A and B and potentially D. It was founded by Eugene's first permanent black families, and was their primary meeting spot during Eugene's transformation from a segregated city to an egalitarian city. The members were the core of Eugene's civil rights movement and they have continued to meet at the church regularly and continually since its founding in 1949.

Though a nomination would perhaps be challenged on the grounds that houses of worship are rarely admitted—a guideline that is becoming less strict—exceptions may be possible for a building of such significance. It may be the first buildings nominated to the Register explicitly because of its association with Eugene's African-American community.

5. It is the author's hope that former residents would support and contribute to a public commemoration process. Such commemoration would provide lessons for future generations of Eugeneians, who even now struggle with race in their schools, their workplaces and their neighborhoods.

In the planning process, partnerships between the city of Eugene, the former residents and local public artists, landscape artists and architects could likely create a new landscape plan for a section of Alton Baker Park that would allow the story of Ferry Street to coexist with the story already being told, one of white Eugeneians like Alton Baker, founder of the *Eugene Register-Guard*. If Eugene's entire population is invited to use the park, those who once inhabited it should see themselves represented there. Though Ferry Street families know that their lives have improved significantly since the 1940s, their evolution was possible because they created their first shelters on the outskirts of Eugene, survived floods, racism and severe conditions, and progressed in spite of local resistance. That story, the story of Eugene's first black community and its evolution from the outskirts of Eugene deserves recognition. There may be no better place, and no more powerful symbol of the power of progress in Eugene. Ferry Street's evolution is a profoundly hopeful story.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

Let us return to the central question of this study: What roles did race and class play in the demolition of Eugene's first African-American neighborhood?

The photo below (Figure 7.1)—one of the only two clear photographs featuring residents of the Ferry Street village—illustrates how deeply ingrained patterns of cultural stratification are.



Figure 7.1: Ferry Street Relationships
Even while young, children are informally segregated.

Even amongst children who appear to be no older than seven or eight, there are divisions. Boys control the pump while girls stand nearby. The children divide themselves along racial lines, splitting the photograph down the middle. And the resource, the water pump, is surrounded by white children while the black children stand off the platform, without their shoes.

While this photo depicts no malice between the two racial groups, it also shows no integration among the children. By the time of this photo, ca. 1949, their lives were always ordered by invisible structures of power.

This was true throughout Eugene. The story of the Ferry Street village, with all its associated meanings, its lessons, and its drama, is still a story of how the powerful control the lives of those with less power. While the narrative can be used to inspire pride, a sense of cultural identity, and strength, it is still a story of disparities based on socioeconomic class. It would not be until the 1950s and much later that the United States would collectively shift away from its long-held assumptions about race and class. Therefore, the cultural narratives that are associated with Ferry Street are stories of power imbalances.

This contextual set of meanings makes commemoration a sometimes difficult and sensitive activity. Issues of race and class may arise in public discussions and in public planning processes. Those who have long felt overpowered by the majority should not be asked to engage in a similar process now. Therefore, all conversations regarding commemoration must respect the boundaries and the wishes of the people to whom these stories belong.

As a culture, we commemorate what we value, and Eugene has recently taken multiple opportunities to honor its African-American elders. Mattie Reynolds recently received the Distinguished Service Award from the University of Oregon faculty for her civil rights work, for instance. If we are sensitive to the meanings and implications of the public history we share, we have an opportunity to prepare a commemoration plan that both acknowledges the painful history associated with race in Eugene and honors those who withstood it.

At the conclusion of this project, there are numerous areas available for further study. For instance, the author hopes that through the gathering of greater photographic and recorded evidence, we might yet develop an analysis of the built resources that once existed at Ferry Street. Such material could, with the help of archaeological artifacts, create a more nuanced understanding of the ways the site was used and occupied. Such material could also guide a physical plan for commemoration on site.

Other issues addressed in this research deserve further attention. There are still media sources to approach, founding Ferry Street family members who are no longer local to be interviewed, and armchair historians who may yet find photographs or other documentary evidence within their private collections. The author hopes that research efforts related to the Ferry Street village will continue under the direction of the University of Oregon's John Fenn and that future scholars will take this work further, perhaps launching a public process for permanent commemoration. If so, the author hopes that work is begun while Ferry Street founders are still accessible as it is their history this work seeks to preserve and celebrate.

This may be quite possible, as it has recently been announced that Oregon is attempting to establish a state museum of African-American history in Salem. Organizers recognize that Eugene's story not only defines issues of race and class for one city but contributes to a statewide and national narrative of evolution. It is, therefore, possible to integrate Eugene's historical and material evidence into a collection of exhibits that tell a statewide story. However, at the conclusion of this study, the author feels that the location of the Ferry Street village, though not the most convenient place for a local monument, is most appropriate due to the importance of its history.

It is the author's hope that while commemorative models are discussed, refined, and ultimately embraced, preference will be given to the authentic nature of the Ferry Street site and its unique position amongst all sites in Eugene associated with African-American history. However, this, like all other elements of a future commemorative plan, should be up for public discussion.

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