



PRESERVATION AND COMMUNITY STORY

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Who are you? Where did your family come from? Who and how did this town get started? Why is it still here?

Finding, preserving, and connecting with an area's cultural heritage, can be extremely important in making people--even newcomers--feel a part of something. Preservation takes on various forms depending on the community and is defined by action taken by residents or institutions to maintain shared identity and community narrative. Self-determination of future paths can be tied closely to the ability to shape the narrative of both original purpose (why people started living together here) and the present purpose (why we are still living here). Conversely, failure of a town to create shared identity and preserve its past can lead to negative self-perceptions and low cooperation.

One of the biggest findings in this research was just how important a sense of belonging was to each community member. Our culture and heritage is so important because it defines our identity and belonging to a particular group of people or place. This sense of belonging creates unity within your community and because it is so valuable should not be lost. When done right, celebrations are inclusive of newcomers, providing them opportunities to take part and join in the shared identity, even if their ancestry is from elsewhere.

What is in this tool?

This will help assess your library work toward building resident belonging through a preservation pathway and identify realistic ways to improve.

Further Resources:

Want to read more about building a sense of belonging in your community? Try the tools "Pathways to Belonging: Contribution", "Pathways to Belonging: To Be Seen and Feel Known", and "Creating Community-Building Events".

IN THEIR WORDS

"We have the archives room and we have all of our history stuff here. ... Like I said, I think my son even though he's annoyed with all the cultural stuff he has to do; I think he's pretty proud to be from here."

Jerianne
Interview 1-1-01

BEGIN BY ASKING

Does your community already have an organization, separate from the library, that concentrates on local history?

If yes, are there ways for you to partner with them that would be beneficial to both organizations and to the community (eg. providing display space or a regular program slot)?

If no, what would your community benefit from learning/teaching/establishing your culture, heritage, history?

Who in the community has local history knowledge, or interest in culture, heritage, and preservation?

What are the most significant things we would like people to know about our history?

Describe the difficult aspects of your local history that need to be addressed (yes, you have them):

What is one undervalued historical resource in town?

IDEAS FOR GETTING STARTED

For Adults

- Dedicate a wall in your library for donated historical photographs, family trees, etc.
- Meet with interested residents to explore forming a committee such as a local history or restoration committee
- Try to find elder residents that you can interview, transcribe their interviews, and make into three ring binders residents can read.
- Look for preservation grants to do an oral history project.
- Document cemeteries and consider submitting to “Find a Grave” or similar free online service.
- Set aside room for a small archives room or small museum where dedicated local archives research can be done.
- Host a time capsule event to bridge the audience between Adults and Children.
- Start an annual celebration around something unique that everyone is proud of.

For Children

- Work with local school/schools to read stories about the area culture, heritage, and area.
- Work with local schools on the history of your town or specific building for a social studies class.
- Invite children to participate in cultural / historical based events.
- Offer crafts that can and will celebrate residents area / culture / heritage

In the Library

- Provide an area of the collection specific to state, area, area families, resident interviews
- Purchase articles, books, and movies about the local area, state, heritage, and/or culture
- Offer free Ancestry.com on computers with occasional genealogy classes
- Host movies about areas culture followed by a discussion
- Start an area Facebook page - (we have one called “I Grew Up In Helvetia”) for people to post current and historical memories and happenings.

YOUR TURN!

Given your answer to the opening questions and the idea sparks listed above, which ideas seem relevant to or would resonate with your community?

Which suggestions are attainable for you as library staff?

Please write a note-to-self on what actions should be taken first to kickstart or deepen preservation in your community/library.
