

**Mapping the Historic West End: The Digital History of an African American Neighborhood in Charlotte, North Carolina**

**This project was made possible in part by a 2017 award from the Catalyst Fund at Lyrasis**

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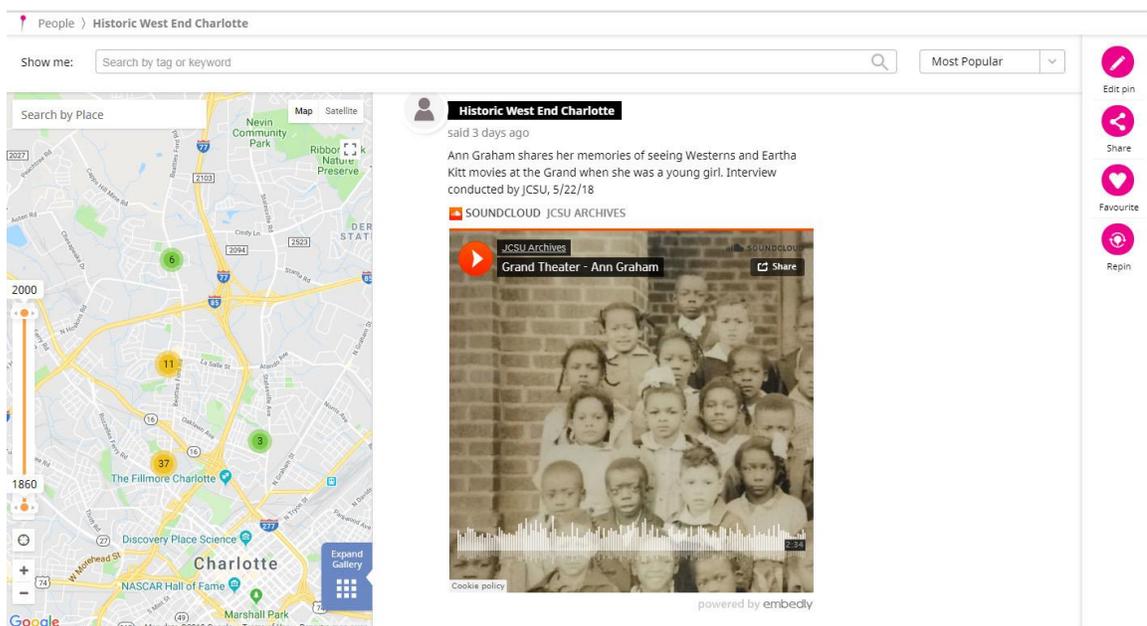
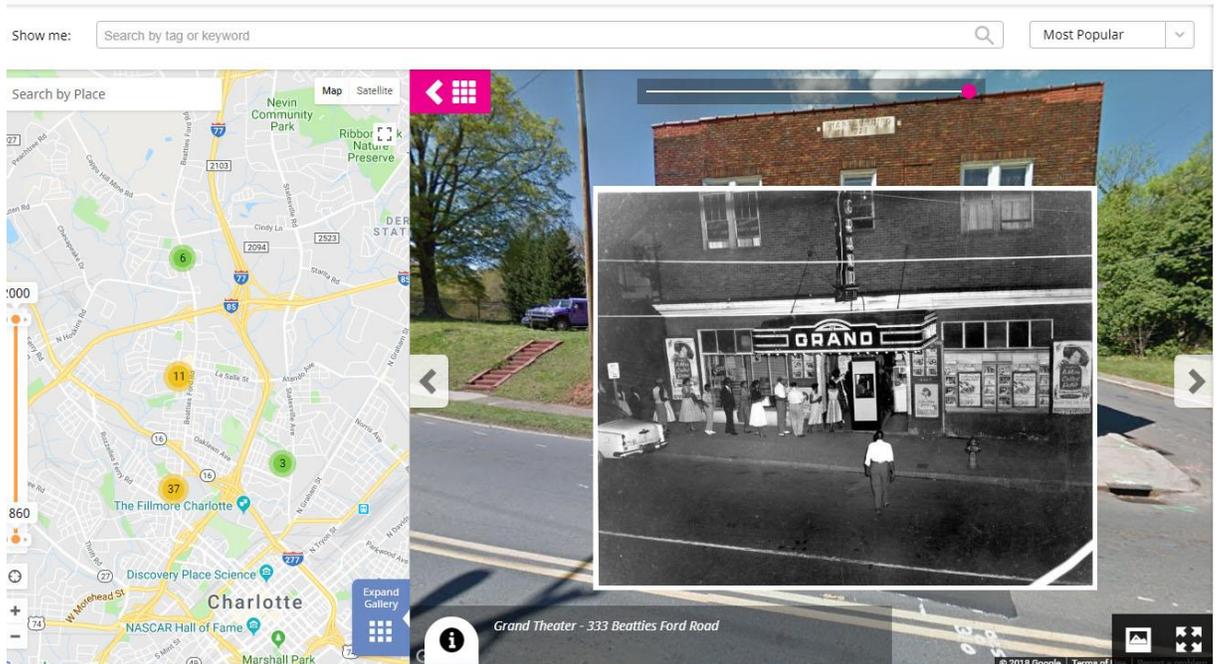


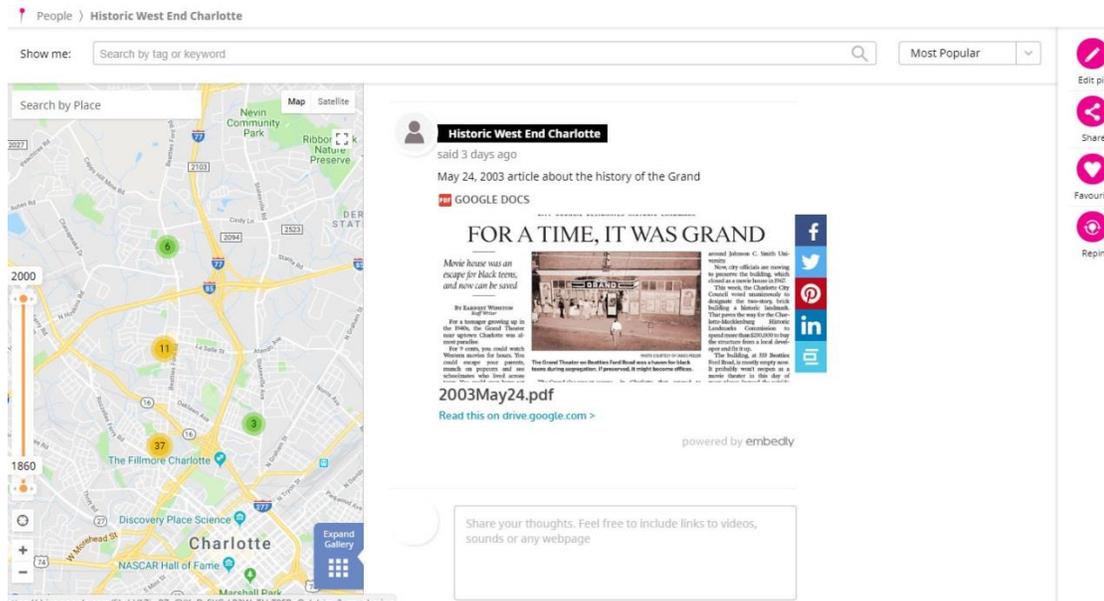
The stated goals of the *Mapping the Historic West End* project generously funded in part by the Catalyst Fund at Lyrasis are to create a web and mobile app framework for publishing location-based content including historical photographs, newspaper articles, and oral histories that will populate a digital interactive map. The map documents the Historic West End, a vibrant 150 year old African American community that surrounds Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU) on the west side of Charlotte, North Carolina and is currently faced with gentrification and social change. In addition to creating new content and making some historical resources available for the first time, the final product will also serve as a central hub that collects and centralizes content digital content from other local institutions and individuals. The project aims to expand the boundaries of how libraries can use mobile technology to bring visual history and users together, and to create and utilize a partnership between local academic and public libraries, museums, government agencies, and community members that will provide a model for other small and historically black college and universities to bring their local history to life.

As this phase of the project comes to an end, the James B. Duke Memorial Library project team has managed to achieve and actually surpass these goals as our map has taken on newer dimensions and has an extremely lively future as we seek to expand it even further. We have successfully identified partners and interview subjects, created, collected, and arranged data, constructed the digital map, and entered into the planning and marketing stage where we will begin to disseminate the end product to the community. The project team has created a master list of interview targets and potential map locations/pins that is constantly being updated and will continue to do so as the project evolves. As of 7/31/18, the team has identified **72** interview targets, and has recorded interviews with **46** of them that have been fully transcribed in their entirety. We have created the digital interactive map of Charlotte's Historic West End using Historypin, who we retained as a consultant and designer. So far the project team has created **56** separate location points or "pins" on the map, each of which is supplemented and augmented by additional material layered into the pin's comment field.

These points can and do link to a variety of historical data and material including digitized newspaper articles from the Charlotte Post and the Charlotte Observer newspapers

and uploaded and shared via Google Drive, segments of interviews recorded by the project team and uploaded to Soundcloud, images from JCSU's collection as well as from other institutions uploaded to Flickr, and links to objects, collections, and materials at other libraries, agencies, and community organizations. Below is an example of a pin for the Grand Theater, a historic building that once housed a movie theater that catered to blacks only. The initial pin is shown along with captures of two of the comments showing how material is layered.





Our research has identified **88** potential total map location pins, including **18** separate and distinct West End neighborhoods that were or are considered majority African American communities. In addition, research into the archives of the Charlotte Observer newspaper online has yielded **267** articles so far from 1892 – 2018 that reference the West End potential location pins (neighborhoods, landmarks, and local pioneers and names) that were identified.

The project team identified five valuable institutions that would partner with us and provide content and guidance: The University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC), the Carolina Room of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Library (CMPL), the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department, the Levine Museum of the New South, and the Second Ward High School Alumni Association. So far we have made **4** research trips to UNCC and obtained **18** images and **21** letters that have not been previously digitized to use for the map. We have also identified **14** collections and links via the J. Murrey Atkins Digital Collections portal that we will link to on the map.

We have also made **3** research trips to the CMPL and have obtained **57** images in addition to **18** school directories and **20** Sanborn fire insurance maps that had not been digitized at that point. Partnerships with the Second Ward Alumni Association and the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Planning Department have been nurtured, and the next phase of our project will involve researching their available material in detail. We have made **2** trips to the

Planning Department and received **66** pages of reports with photographs that they had created on West End neighborhoods that had not been previously digitized or made available. Another source of digital material we did not count on in the original proposal was Digital NC, NC Maps, Documenting the American South, and other collections in the digital holdings of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. So far, we have identified **18** links to connect to the map there. Also we took **11** pages of blueprints of the McCrorey Heights neighborhood near our campus and **7** African American Presbyterian newspapers published at JCSU to Digital NC to get digitized and linked to the map, since their scanners were better for the size and fragility of the materials. We have also linked to content from the *Behind the Veil: Documenting African American Life in the Jim Crow South* collection of oral histories held at Duke University.

Our partnership with the Levine Museum of the New South has been the most exciting and dynamic collaboration as it has evolved. In the next phase of our project, *Mapping the Historic West End* will become part of a community-based multidimensional project in partnership with the Levine and the Arts and Sciences Council Culture Blocks program that seeks to combine physical and digital exhibits to create a unique experience. Talks are underway to include the digital map as part of a larger travelling exhibit that will engage community members in the West End and take them on a physical walking tour that is digitally enhanced and will reach different target populations. These populations have been dissected and researched in several face-to-face and online meetings with our Historypin project consultants. These talks have identified five distinct target populations we want to reach with our project, and detailed planning has been undertaken to record specific outcomes we would like to see, activities we would perform to achieve these outcomes, and measurable ways to visualize these outcomes for each audience. This approach has greatly enhanced and sharpened the way we plan to market and focus the project.

One way we have made contacts and met interview subjects as well as to raise awareness of the project and the necessity for it is to reach out to the community we are documenting. To date our outreach activities to this point have included attending **8** neighborhood and community association meetings, contacting **7** West End churches to pass out project fliers, promoting the project in **5** West End community publications and

newsletters, and integrating the project with other oral history initiatives being conducted by the JCSU Humanities department and funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. In addition we have visited two churches in our mapping area and digitized archival material in their history rooms as well as set up appointments to give them training lessons on preservation. Outreach and marketing activities for the future of the project will greatly increase, and a coordinated effort will be sustained by JCSU, our identified institutional and community partners, and our consultant. Another goal is to increase face-to-face training sessions with our friends and neighbors in the community; we have provided **4** preservation workshops open to the community that provide basic tips on how to preserve, organize, and protect documents and photographs, and plan to approach specific churches and neighborhoods offering our services in the future to help safeguard the important artifacts of the area.

In addition to the collaboration with the Museum of the New South and the plan to increase the marketing and visibility of the collection, the project team plans to identify and apply for further grants in the next cycle to retain our Project Assistant, who we plan to keep for some months on the library budget to bridge that gap. With further funds, we plan to expand the project out of the West End to the other African American neighborhoods to the North, and hopefully eventually document the black communities that have been wiped off the map due to urban renewal and advanced gentrification in other areas of the city. Now that we have a model and can show stakeholders the powerful visual tools we can create, we are confident there will be buy-in from communities and organizations.

The other next step for our project will be to ensure its longevity and safety by reassessing our digital preservation policies and procedures, which were addressed by a Lyraasis consultant. We will implement the recommendations including updating and extending existing expectations for documentation and activities across the library to digital preservation, training more staff in digital preservation, assess needs across campus in order to determine potential collaborators, create an inventory of all unique digital collections and file naming practices and where they are stored, and incorporating funding for digital preservation training into digitization grant applications. This project has emboldened us to expand our digital footprint into the community and the city of Charlotte to show our capability to be the institution

responsible for upholding and documenting the legacy of these neighborhoods and their residents. We have realized that to do that we need to prove we are worthy stewards of the information we are receiving and up to the standards of the field.

To contain and present this information we have created with the digital map, we plan to rearrange our digitally available items, which exist in many places on the web, into one distinct and focused umbrella site known as Digital Smith, which will contain the Historic West End map as well as our digital collections stored through Content DM, a libguide on the archival resources available at JCSU, yearbooks, catalogs, maps, and other materials digitized by Digital NC, and information about our collaboration with Culture Blocks and other community partnerships. The oral histories we have recorded and the images and documents we have gathered will become a part of a West End Neighborhood collection which will be incorporated into our digital and analog archival collections that will establish JCSU as the repository for information on the West End as well as the African American community of Charlotte.

We are extremely excited about what we have done and what we plan to do, and we feel we have successfully re-established JCSU's long history as the anchor and keeper of this neighborhood's history. We are greatly indebted to Lyrasis for their assistance in reaching this goal and we look forward to hopefully continuing that partnership as we move this project forward in the future.