

URBAN COMMUNITY FIELD RESEARCH PROJECT

by JoAnne Lanouette

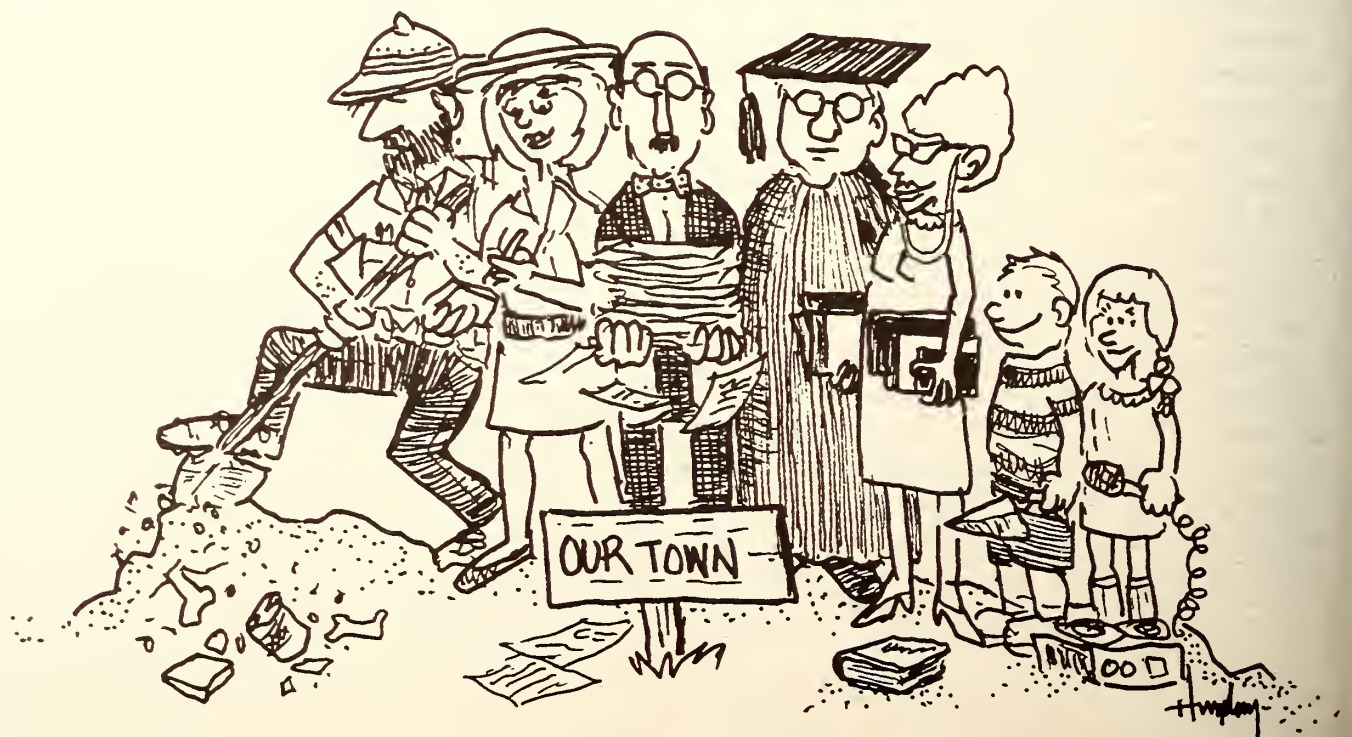


If students grow up in downtown Cleveland (Ohio), attend Cuyahoga Community College (CCC), and take Mark Lewine's anthropology class, they might join a dig on campus and discover much about the history of their own community, an immigrant starting point at various times for English, Germans, Czechs, Italians, Jews, and for African Americans. But the Urban Community Research Project serves many more than one class. In fact, this five-year pilot program in historical archaeology offers an exciting interdisciplinary collaboration among the CCC and a number of area academic institutions, museums and agencies. It draws students from other local community and four-year colleges, junior and senior high schools, and encourages the involvement of citizen volunteers. More than 500 people have participated since the program began in 1994. The team behind this successful effort includes Dr. Mark Lewine, CCC professor of Anthropology and Sociology; consulting historic archaeologist Al Lee; and Dorothy Salem, historian and professor of Women's Studies and African Studies at CCC.

The first site investigated by the Program was originally a private residential property, now a part of Cuyahoga Community College's Metro campus. Standing for over one hundred years in the shadow of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church and Franciscan

Monastery, the site was somewhat protected from disturbance. The students' archival and archaeological research, under the supervision of the project's leaders, led to recovering evidence of two identifiable occupations of the site. The earlier occupation, dating between 1825 and 1840, was by as yet unidentified rural villagers who used the site domestically and for cottage industry soap-making. In the mid-1850s the Burkhart family established a residence and wallpaper business on the property. Through the last quarter of the nineteenth century, as Burkhart daughters grew up and married, their husbands' building trades such as tinsmithing, roofing, window-making, carpentry and painting were added to the services offered by the wallpaper business.

Students in the program conducted document research in the archives of the Western Reserve Historical Society, studied maps, and analyzed the remains and contents of cisterns, privies and trash pits recovered archaeologically from the site. The faculty then helped the students integrate the data to help establish the evidence for the social and economic changes that occurred as this outpost of a rural village became a small neighborhood off a large industrialized urban center. Further, the distinctive consumer behavior of the family, who maintained for business reasons a horse and wagon, provides an illuminating



contrast with the more typical "walking city" consumer pattern. Today a parking lot is being built over the site for the CCC's use, but underneath archaeological opportunities still exist.

Current investigations by the Program are at the Long-Severance site, also situated on the metro campus. Student archival research showed that Dr. David Long developed the property in the mid 1840s as a "country estate." Long was a prominent Cleveland physician and merchant. He established his practice and a dry goods store in the village of Cleveland in 1810 and was a central figure in affairs of business, religion, politics, philanthropy and social reform for the next forty years. His descendants, through his daughter Mary Long Severance, have remained prominent in Cleveland business and civic affairs well into the twentieth century.

A major social concern for the Long and Severance families was opposition to slavery. Long and his son-in-law Solomon Severance were founding officers of the Cleveland (1831) and Cuyahoga County (1837) Anti-Slavery Societies. Solomon's brother Theodoric and his wife Caroline were early advocates of a more militant, abolitionist position, and all were later involved in the founding of new Presbyterian churches as old congregations split over the issue. Severance's involvement in African-American affairs continued beyond emancipation; a letter dated 1913 from Booker T. Washington to Louis Severance (Solomon and Mary's son) thanks him for his continued support of Tuskegee Institute.

Urbanization caught up with the Severance home in the early 1860s, by which time Cleveland was the fastest growing urban center in the nation. A portion of the property was subdivided into small, single-family and commercial lots, and a church occupied the corner of a newly erected street. Gradually the area became a middle class section of the walking city, and then gradually the economic and social standing of the neighborhood declined as the area became more industrial. When the Severances moved from the property in 1899, it was purchased and developed for St. Ann's Infant Asylum and Maternity Hospital, an institution operated by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Cleveland for the aid of unwed mothers. The property was obtained from the corporate descendent of St. Ann's in 1973.

Archaeological research is continuing on the Long/Severance site this spring and summer. The Urban Community Research Project has also established an archaeological laboratory with office and teaching facilities. Recently the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation granted funding for the first of what is hoped will be a series of Archaeological Youth Camps, which would attract middle and high school students to the community college and the project. The connection of the Long and Severance families to abolition has served as an initial vehicle for the establishment of a collaborative relationship between the project and the Institute for African American Affairs and Kent State University, Dr. Diedre Badejo, Director.

After five years, Mark Lewine, Al Lee and Dorothy Salem see the collaborative project not just producing a site with findings that promise original and significant contributions to the social and cultural history of Cleveland. Students have learned to integrate information from archives, photos, street maps, census data, and from long-time residents of the area, along with the material culture history found at the site. Originally begun as an applied field experience for Cuyahoga Community College archaeology students, this project has demonstrated its value as a pedagogical tool, a source for interdisciplinary field research, a setting for collaborative work for regional students from a wide variety of schools, and a source for increasing knowledge about community history. The residents' interest in their neighborhood and the significant connection between college and community has deepened. Community college students who participated had their first contacts with students from regional universities, graduate students, faculty from those universities as well as a museum archaeologist and an archivist from the county archives. Visiting these institutions showed the students viable possibilities for their own future study and work opportunities that they never imagined before.

Such a project should inspire other archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians in museums, community colleges, and universities to join together to create community history research projects for their city or town. In the process the barriers between urban

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community, community college, university, and museum can diminish, and at the very least, student interest in archaeology, anthropology, and other social sciences can increase. For students, learning more about their city's history makes their city come alive for them.

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