WHAT IS NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY?

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WHAT IS HISTORY?
HISTORY IS A “STORY” ABOUT THE PAST FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STORYTELLER OR HISTORIAN

We do history to make sense of the past.

We use this story about the past to shape the future.

There is no “one” history. There are as many histories as there are storytellers.
WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF THE STORY?
SO, ARE ALL HISTORIES OR STORIES EQUAL??
NO, THE VALUE OF A HISTORY IS ITS ABILITY TO EXPLAIN THE PAST.

A good history is like a good scientific hypothesis. It is one that ties together the past in a consistent and compelling fashion.

A bad history or “fake history” is unable to hold together its version of the past consistently and lacks a compelling rationale.
IS A GOOD HISTORY ALWAYS A GOOD HISTORY?
Again, history is like science. Our knowledge evolves.


For example, Howard Zinn vs. Jill Lapore
The short answer is no.

Fact vs Truth

Again, history is like science. Can never be positive about anything. Constantly trying to disprove.

Truth = Value of the theory/story
HOW DO YOU DO HISTORY?
Primary vs Secondary Sources

Secondary sources are what other historians have written about a particular topic. You read others to contextualize and to find “gaps.”

Primary sources are unanalyzed data or artifacts. The stuff out of which you establish your “facts.”
SO THEN, WHAT IS NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY?
THE STORY OF YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD’S PAST

Pre-history + pre-development to the present. Indians + Settlers + Agrarian stage.

Build out + changes over time + current conditions

Use to chart and shape the future
FIRST ISSUE, WHAT IS A NEIGHBORHOOD?
Official city district. City of St. Louis has 79 designated city neighborhoods with clearly defined boundaries.

For residents, it may be something entirely different.

A neighborhood is whatever the residents say it is and which they identify as a place.

Neighborhoods are constantly in flux and overlap with one another.
WHAT AREA DOES A NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY USE?
It depends upon the story.

Different histories address different areas depending upon the purpose of the story.

For example, Tower Grove vs Tower Grove South vs Tower Grove Heights
WHAT DOES A NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORY COVER?
WHATEVER THE HISTORIAN THINKS IS IMPORTANT

Address **The Five Cs**

- Characters
- Chronology
- Context
- Causation
- Consequences

**Some Usual Topics**

- Social: Residents, Social Institutions
- Demographics, Businesses, Stakeholders
- Physical: Architectural Style, Urban planning
- Infrastructure, Geography, Topography
- Political: Zoning, Urban policy, Key Events

**Worst Historical Sin:** “Every other damn thing”
Not telling a story
WHERE DO YOU START?
SUGGESTED READINGS

GENERAL HISTORY

U.S. History | *These Truths: A History of the United States* by Jill Lapore and/or *Who Built America* (college textbook)

Urban History | *The Evolution of American Urban Society* by Howard Chudacoff et. al. and *The Twentieth-Century American City* by Jon Teaford

St. Louis History | *The Lion of the Valley* by James Neal Primm
African American St. Louis History: *Missouri’s Black Heritage* by Lorenzo Greene
SUGGESTED READINGS

EXISTING NEIGHBORHOOD HISTORIES

Norman Wayman’s histories for the city
  https://www.stlouis-mo.gov/government/departments/planning/cultural-resources/neighborhood-histories.cfm
Where We Live, edited by Tim Fox
St. Louis: Landmarks and Historic Districts, by Carolyn Toft
Reedy Press Series, e.g. Tower Grove by Mark Abbott
Arcadia Press Series, e.g. St. Louis's Delmar Loop by M.M. Constantin
THANK YOU

Workshops 2-6 will continue to guide you through the process of developing a neighborhood history.

Upcoming Workshop Schedule

Feb 21  Workshop 2 / Thurs. 6 - 7:30pm
Feb 25  Workshop 3 / Mon. 6 - 7:30pm
Mar  4  Workshop 4 / Mon. 6 - 7:30pm
Mar 14  Workshop 5 / Thurs. 12 - 1:30pm
Mar 20  Workshop 6 / Wed. 6 - 7:30pm