



Geography and Genealogy (FSEM)

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House Genealogy Project: City Park West and Capitol Hill North Neighborhoods

This exercise will explore house genealogy information in partnership with community volunteers from two Denver neighborhoods: City Park West and Capitol Hill North. The main goal is to assist community members who are interested in pursuing landmark status and historic preservation for their properties. Our FSEM will assist with research about selected properties that are at least 100 years old and are contributors from an architectural or historical point of view. The properties were selected after a detailed communication was shared through the neighborhoods Facebook and Nextdoor pages. Since its foundation, the University of Denver has had the goal of becoming “...a great private university dedicated to the public good.” This academic project contributes to this vision.

Objective

Assist with the preservation of contributing architecture/historical properties and help maintain the historic character of the city of Denver.

Deliverables

Historic property report based on primary and secondary sources and fieldwork. The students are expected to provide evidence of library research (Denver Public Library), ancestry.com research, and fieldwork. The report should consist of up to 5 pages of information about the property, historic occupants, contributing architecture, etc. The report should include photographs of the candidate properties (front and sides) and any supporting documentation: maps, obituaries, newspaper articles, etc. **Project due on Thursday, November 5.**

Step 1: Group Selection and House Pairing

Houses:

- 1563 N Lafayette Street
- 1725 N Williams Street
- 1748 N High Street
- 2141 N Gilpin Street

- 2211 N Vine Street
- 1571 - 1583 N Ogden Street

Step 2: Fieldwork

The project involves a fieldtrip to visit the properties and to meet the community volunteers (Saturday, Oct. 24 → 11am meeting at Beet Box Café - 1030 E 22nd Ave, Denver, CO 80205). The students will walk in groups to the vetted properties and will collect first hand information from the current owners. In addition the students will photograph their assigned property (front and sides) in a professional way. The students then are expected to meet at Kitchen Table Café → 1426 E 22nd Ave at 12pm for lunch and debriefing with their professor.

Step 3: Web Research

The students will be trained on accessing digital collections at ancestry.com and the Denver Public library that will allow them to locate information prior to their library visit. These collections can include census forms, property records, wills, obituaries, biographical accounts, and architectural information among others prior to their library visit. The students will organize these visits based on their schedules.

Step 4: Library Research

Once former occupants and architectural styles have been identified the students will proceed to the genealogy center (Level 5) at Denver Public Library (Civic Center Downtown) to collect maps, obituaries, directories, newspaper articles, and other relevant information about the properties.

Step 5: Report

Based on all the information found, the students will prepare a final report that will be submitted to the owners for comments. The report will be up to 5 pages long excluding citations. This project is worth 10% of the final grade.

Reflection

The FSEM I teach is entitled Geography and Genealogy and the main objective of the class is to provide a detailed overview of genealogy in relation to the geographic, religious, economic, political and social processes that shaped the migration choices of our ancestors. The course focuses on intensive research of a variety of primary and secondary sources such as Ellis Island records and census records.

Within this learning framework this past Autumn 2015 term, I developed a final research project that helped to sharpen the students' research skills while engaged in a service learning project related to the historic preservation of older properties in Denver. The final project consisted of pairing student teams with community members interested in applying for historic designation status based on three categories: geography (location contribution to the city of Denver's character), history (association with the historical development of the city or with a person or group of persons who had influence on society), and architecture (possesses distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style).

The community partners were recruited via City Park West / Park Hill Neighborhoods Next Door and Facebook websites. The project involved a field trip in which the students met the

community partners and collected information and pictures of the property. The students went to the downtown Denver Public Library to further investigate property records with the aid of librarians. The students also conducted research via ancestry.com (a required class tool) to research the property's census records and occupant's biographies. The main goal was to provide our community partners with a complete report to be used as part of the historic designation application.

The students were quite engaged with the project once they visited their assigned properties and got to meet the property owners and collect information in situ. The students had the chance to polish their recently acquired research skills with primary and secondary sources of information, and to participate in old fashioned field trips and library research. Their main strategies were to pair up with a librarian at the Denver Public Library who guided them through the available databases. The students had to do research about the architectural types and also the geographic aspect of the neighborhood so they could learn a little bit more about Denver.

This was a great opportunity for the students and for me as the instructor. We got to experience service learning while contributing to the preservation of the geographic/historic/architectural character of Denver. Many of the out of state students were able to learn in depth about Denver's development as a city and got to enjoy the unique downtown architecture which is threatened by rapid urban development and infill. The students got to immerse themselves into old Denver.

Some of the challenges were that the properties were very different from each other. Some properties had lots of available information, while others were lacking. Some had significant advantages historically/architecturally in comparison to the others. It was somewhat difficult to provide a comparable experience for all students. Next time, we would like to partner with a city councilman who is seeking to conduct research of historic properties along Colfax Avenue. Due to the large number of properties involved, it will be easier to provide all students with a similar and meaningful experience. It will be also beneficial to have the city of Denver as our project partner since the results will be incorporated in the larger Colfax Avenue Development Project.

There were several interesting research results: 1) matching a property to a previous owner who was the first City of Denver librarian, 2) linking a property to a former presidential candidate, and 3) determining that one property owner was the founder of the Jewish National Hospital. To complete the loop, we are eager to learn if any of the community partners were successful in obtaining historic status for their hous