



Apply Now: Oral History and Digital Curation Internship

Project Overview

Initially a labor enclave attached to a public university, Northside is both unique and exemplary in its history of interconnected byways of work, labor, and economy. Through oral histories and the digitization of documents that reflect the full spectrum of community life, this project will preserve and advance the legacy of work in Northside. The documents will be shared at a public event as a themed visual exhibit coupled with listening stations, interpretive commentary by scholars, and story circles. These events will help us to understand more about sub-economies, desegregation, and the connections between business, school, church, and family that have long distinguished Northside and similar communities across the U.S.

Like similar communities across the country, the Northside neighborhoods of Chapel Hill, North Carolina – Pottersfield, Sunset, Tin Top, Windy Hill – emerged in the early part of the 20th century with the demise of sharecropping in the South, the rise of the railroad, and the promise of better jobs at rapidly growing industrial sites. But while many Black families sought freedom from the tightening grip of Jim Crow by forging pathways to the north, many went only as far as the nearest textile factory or, in the case of Northside settlers, the public university. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the flagship campus of the UNC system and the first publicly chartered university in the nation, was growing at an unprecedented rate. It needed labor.

Northside residents maintained University grounds and did the laundry. They hauled water to students in the dormitories and cared for the homes and children of University faculty and administrators. They established the first mechanic shop and janitorial associations. They also used their artisanal skills to create the distinctive stone walls that surround the campus. Meanwhile, they grew churches and self-funded schools and built a community center. Entrepreneurs opened restaurants, movie theatres, and a motel and supper club just off the rail line that carried Carr Mill cotton north and the great jazz artists of the day south. Cab Calloway, Ella Fitzgerald and Ike and Tina Turner played at the University and stayed at the Mason motel. By the mid-1950s, Northside was a bustling, neo-urban town-within-a-town linked by family and economy to Durham, the “big tobacco” town just over the border to the north.

In the early 60s, while clergy and college students organized for civil rights across the nation, teenagers from the local Black high school led the charge in Chapel Hill. They struggled for 3 long years before the town finally capitulated to federal law and required open access to places of public accommodation. But desegregation took its toll. Black-owned businesses collapsed while Black teachers and administrators were dismissed or demoted, leaving a gaping hole in a thriving economy and in a culture defined by tight binds between family, church, school, and business. More recently, soaring property taxes and predatory investment have prompted longtime neighbors to find affordable housing elsewhere. While 4th and 5th generation Northside residents still live in family homes their ancestors built and worship with their children and grandchildren, changes in the housing market and a shifting jobs landscape have strained multigenerational continuity. The motto to which neighbors have long subscribed—“without the past you have no future”—has become particularly salient in a context in which collective history is at risk of being lost and, with it, the heart of a strong community from whose example we can all learn.

Scope of Work

Oral History

Over the course of the summer, interns will be sitting down with residents of Northside's neighborhoods to listen to their life histories and help document answers to the following questions: *What is the history of work and labor in Northside? How did Northside residents not only get by but prosper? What were the strengths and limits of the segregated economy and what challenges and perspectives does it offer Northside today?* Each intern will plan to conduct 8-12 interviews over the course of the summer, preparing all necessary preparation and processing documents as outlined in the Marian Cheek Jackson Center's Oral History Guide.

Responsibilities include but are not limited to:

- Maintaining the highest degree of professional and ethical interaction with all community members as indicated in the MCJC Oral History Guide.
- Completing an Interview Preparation Guide for each arranged interview.
- Completing designated audio-recorded interviews in .wav file format at approximately 1.5 hours .
- Completing and submitting of all processing materials as outlined in the MCJC Oral History Guide, including photos and scanned materials.
- Communicating with the Jackson Center about any particular delays or challenges encountered.
- Returning all recording equipment in the condition in which it was received.

Digital Curation

Interns will provide support for the development of the Northside Memory Keepers United Material Culture Collections. This will involve working with community members to scan and accession materials, transcribing and processing audio files, and co-curating an exhibit to be held at the Hargraves Community Center in the fall. Interns will also provide support for shaping digital exhibits that will be incorporated into the Northside Digital Commons, and may help with other projects related to the Digital Commons, including but not limited to:

- Developing an interactive and multi-media map of the neighborhoods based on community input that will include historic images, current photographs, audio clips, and informative text
- Help edit a video montage from footage gathered at the 2019 Northside Festival
- Piecing together narratives from the audio clip library that will be sent to the Community Review Board for review and ultimately incorporation into the Northside Digital Commons
- Writing short biographies of all who have been interviewed as a part of the Oral History Trust
- Providing transcription and abstract writing support for interviews done in the past

Other Responsibilities

All interns will help with organizing and publicizing relevant events, spreading the work about initiatives related to the digital archive, and supporting the project as needed.

Intern positions are paid and will be 8-12 weeks long at approximately 20 hours/week. Start date is flexible within the month of June. To apply please follow this link (<https://forms.gle/JXVbCx98fa7sqGuC7>) and respond to the questions in the survey. We will review applications on a rolling basis. Thank you for your interest!