

The Precious Places Community History Project

Louis Massiah, Scribe Video Center

Between 2003 and 2007, the Scribe Video Center in Philadelphia facilitated a citywide community history project, teaming 43 neighborhood groups in Philadelphia, Camden, NJ, Chester, PA and Ardmore, PA with filmmakers, humanities and social science scholars. Through the Precious Places Community History project members of diverse communities worked with Scribe to create short histories of each neighborhood.

Although the completed documentaries focus on a specific historic site in the neighborhood – a church, a playground, a tree, a park, a sign – many of the works also explore important current issues with which the communities are wrestling – eminent domain, gentrification, need for green space.

The Precious Places Community History project has had at least four important products – 1. a collection of 43 short (8 to 13 minute) documentaries that document life in the Philadelphia area; 2 – a collection of extended oral and video histories with residents of these diverse neighborhoods and communities; 3 – solid skills training in media production for neighborhood residents; 4 – an opportunity for university and college based scholars to work in a community based settings in support of the neighborhood project.

The works to be screened at the Urban Ethnography: Its Traditions and Its Future Conference include:

The Taking of Bodine: Never Forget by Community Leadership Institute (North Philadelphia) confronts the displacement of residents in North Philadelphia through the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative (NTI). Led by neighborhood organizer Rosemary Cubas, the Community Leadership Institute contends that many good neighbors are being pushed out, houses bulldozed and land devalued in a plan that promises “development”, but not for the current residents.

St. Augustine Church, Philadelphia: Immigration & Filipino Transformation by Filipino American National Historical Society (Olde City). The Filipino-American community, long a vital part of the city’s history, has played a crucial role in the re-birth of St. Augustine’s Church at 4th and Vine, a church that has been a center for immigrant communities for over two centuries.

Unhushed! by The Still Standing Project (Camden). Community historian Beverly Roberts had covered a hidden truth about Pomona Hall, an 18th century plantation owned by the Cooper family, the founders of Camden. *Unhushed!*

pays tribute to the enslaved Africans who worked on this farm in what is now the center of Camden.

Pride of the Hill by Cramer Hill Residents Association (North Camden). The stable, working class community of Cramer Hill is slated to be bulldozed by eminent domain. Life-long residents talk about growing up in this neighborhood along the Delaware River and document their struggle to save their homes.

Strawberry Mansion, Neighborhood by the Park by the East Park Revitalization Alliance (North Philadelphia). Strawberry Mansion, the neighborhood that sits along the eastern side of Fairmount Park, is a mixture of city and country. With acres and acres of parkland, a reservoir, 19th century mansions and a well used neighborhood riding stable, it is not what most people think of when they think of “urban.” Long-term residents talk about this special part of Philadelphia.

Louis Massiah, the founder and executive director of Scribe, will present these works.