

THE (RE-)BIRTH OF A NATION

URBAN ARCHAEOLOGY, ETHICS, AND THE HERITAGE TOURISM INDUSTRY

Kelly M. Britt and Christine Chen

Kelly M. Britt and Christine Chen are both Ph.D. candidates in Anthropology, Columbia University, New York.

In the tourism industry, heritage is increasingly something that can be acquired as well as objectified, and it is here that archaeologists play a role, providing material evidence of heritage. As a consequence, issues of ownership, curation, stewardship, and representation have become heavily contested among the various stakeholders involved, including academics. Though archaeological investigation provides empirical data that may be used for validating specific narratives, it can also be subjectively interpreted and used to support competing narratives. Within the context of heritage tourism, it becomes necessary to identify and market an “official narrative.” Indeed, narrative has become the key vehicle through which contesting stakeholders have found expression, with archaeologists at times composing these narratives or authenticating them and then coping with the necessity for other experts and consultants to authenticate them.

Heritage tourism and urban archaeology have become unconventional bedfellows. As cities, particularly small historic cities in need of economic revitalization, become more dependent upon heritage tourism, archaeology *in* and *of* the urban landscape has become both an asset and a product for heritage tourism in these cities. The reasons for this partnership are twofold. First, historic districts and restoration areas provide cultural destinations in which residents may take pride and for visitors to experience, but they are generally costly. If done within state and federal guidelines, projects may require archaeology to be conducted, but tax benefits and grants may accrue to the owners as incentives. Second, archaeology can provide the authenticity needed for historic preservation and renewal projects to take shape and succeed. These projects use, and are at times dependent upon, archaeology to validate their successes. Sites are both cultural resources and cultural heritage assets with a use value and an intrinsic value that are consumed during the tourism process (McKercher and du Cros 2002). Heritage tourism projects produce a complex network of negotiations between multiple stakeholders who are variously involved in processes of validation, and archaeologists are only one of these stakeholders.

Case Study: Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Like many small American cities, Lancaster in the 1960s and 1970s executed an urban renewal project in its center city. A number of historic structures were bulldozed and replaced with an austere, concrete-and-brick shopping center known as Lancaster Square. This development, however, failed to return retail shoppers to the central business district. In the late 1990s, a new redevelopment project was conceived, this time concerning the rehabilitation of the city’s landmark Watt and Shand department store. A group of local businesses purchased the vacant building with the intention of rehabilitating it as a hotel, hoping both to save the historic landscape of the city and to revitalize the economy of downtown Lancaster. For this to work, the city needed to create a reason for people to come and stay. Thus was born the idea of the Lancaster County Convention Center, which from the beginning has been the center of conflict in the county.

The Lancaster historic preservation community initially opposed the Convention Center because the plans called for the demolition of a number of important historic structures. Prompted by these concerns—and partly because they had easements on portions of the proposed Convention Center site—the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County sponsored a small salvage excavation in a targeted area of the site, specifically behind the homes of Thaddeus Stevens and Lydia Hamilton Smith, leading nineteenth-century opponents of slavery (Figure 1). Franklin and Marshall College and Kutztown University jointly undertook the excavation in 2002–2003 with volunteers and students as academic fieldworkers.

Although the site is part of a historic district listed on the National Register and, thus, technically qualified for review under Section 106, the site review process was overlooked. Part of this was due to the fact that no archaeology had been undertaken in Lancaster City until the Thaddeus Stevens and Lydia Hamilton Smith Historic Site excavation was initiated, but also because there was no effective policing among the various agencies to ensure that Section 106 was properly enacted. Moreover, Pennsylvania’s preservation laws, which were



Figure 1: Thaddeus Stevens House and the Kleiss Saloon, Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Photograph by Kelly M. Britt.

amended in the late 1980s, shifted the mitigation-funding burden from the municipal authority undertaking the development action to the State Historic Preservation Office. These factors and others regarding the complex regulatory processes of this site have been discussed in more detail elsewhere (Bennett-Gaieski 2004), but, ultimately, no compliance archaeology was funded by the Convention Center developers.

The excavation uncovered a modified cistern. Evidence provocatively suggested that this feature was modified in the 1850s so that individuals could enter it through an opening in the adjacent tavern owned by Stevens. This supported the proposition that Stevens and Smith directly aided fugitives escaping from slavery. The cistern has become part of a wider discussion about how the Convention Center can be integrated as a heritage tourism attraction that interprets the lives of Stevens and Smith. The use of the Underground Railroad (UGRR) as a narrative for this site has provided much controversy. The historic Bethel AME church in Lancaster has already incorporated the UGRR narrative into their reenactment entitled *Living the Experience*. Located in ChurchTowne, another historic section of the city, the church recently applied for city and state funds to economically and socially redevelop the neighborhood by establishing businesses and residences owned and operated by the predominantly African American population that lives there. The ChurchTowne project hopes to build a UGRR wax and interactive museum, gift shop, and theater. Only blocks away from the Stevens and Smith site, ChurchTowne was at first seen by some as competition for the UGRR narrative and the tourist dollar. Moreover, whereas the ChurchTowne UGRR narrative has been entirely defined by the African American community, the issue still remains of

how to reconcile the participation of the disparate stakeholders in the interpretation of this archaeological site.

In the heart of downtown Lancaster, the Stevens and Smith site has turned into a place of contention. Some are skeptical that the Convention Center will revitalize the downtown or attract new visitors. A group of county hoteliers fear that the new hotel and Convention Center will cost them business, and they have already engaged in a series of costly and unsuccessful lawsuits. In addition, there are individuals in the county who do not want to see the legacy of the pro-black, antislavery Stevens commemorated. Still others feel this Convention Center is exactly what is needed to jumpstart a new cycle of revitalization. Conservators and historic preservationists, on the other hand, are concerned with how the new project may affect the historic structures of the neighborhood.

Historic preservation is not a new concept in Lancaster, but what started as a preservation project has turned into a grand-scale endeavor involving multiple nonlocal interests including American Express, the Smithsonian, Public Broadcasting Services, and the Discovery Channel. Though the UGRR narrative has existed for over 100 years, these recent attentions have provided the impetus needed to save the Stevens and Smith buildings and created a new narrative through which the site can be promoted for heritage tourism. Originally, the Stevens and Smith properties were scheduled for demolition, but now the cistern and substantial portions of the historic buildings have been incorporated into the planned Convention Center. Furthermore, a Stevens and Smith Museum will be attached to the Convention Center, and even the Convention Center Authority now sees this archaeological site as the backbone for the Center's tourism initiative. This has provided the needed link to build the present upon the past while also addressing the long-standing issues of race and class that confront the urban landscape of Lancaster.

These issues continue to create conflict in Lancaster County, as "white flight" has created a symbolic gulf between the outlying county and the inner city. The county has increasingly become a destination for Amish-seeking tourism; many of the white middle-class residents of this sphere perceive Lancaster proper as a blight-ridden inner city inhabited primarily by Latinos and African Americans and thus as a place to be avoided. Because the Convention Center was proposed as a node for heritage tourism for the city, the UGRR narrative has been embraced as a way to bridge this gulf. Meanwhile, the archaeologists' roles have become somewhat smaller; the site interpretation is currently in the hands of a private museum-consulting firm. The archaeologists and other academics involved instead have established local community outreach initiatives, which may or may not be utilized in the final presentation of the site.

As can be seen in the Thaddeus Stevens and Lydia Hamilton

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Smith Historic Site excavation and the circumstances surrounding it, archaeological research can galvanize divergent groups in a community. Prior to the archaeological component of the Convention Center project, the UGRR narrative largely belonged to the residents of ChurchTowne, and the Convention Center was viewed solely as a commercial undertaking. Now, the debate over the *official* UGRR narrative in Lancaster involves a far larger portion of the community, and the Convention Center can be seen as having *social value* as well as economic value to the city. Ironically, archaeology now holds a rather narrow position in the presentation of Lancaster City as a heritage destination.

Conclusion

At its heart, heritage involves a community, but often one that is ill-defined or has changed dramatically. It implicates a sense of place, though often redefined or reconstructed. And it brings in a wealth of stakeholders who are often at odds with one another and with the ethical ideals of archaeologists. Taught to prioritize the acquisition of archaeological information and actively support conservation of archaeological resources, archaeologists in this case study were confined not only by the lack of a rigorous regulatory process but also because it was a volunteer-based project led by local academics. Consequently, there was a necessary compromise between the preservation of these houses on the one hand and the ability to put up the Convention Center on the other.

Archaeologists should reexamine ethical guidelines and the means to rework them in circumstances such as those encountered in this case study. After all, archaeology does not dictate the course of action within the communities where it takes place. The present nature of heritage tourism clearly produces more questions than answers. What is the role of an archaeologist in the treatment of heritage? How does an archaeologist decide it is better to tear down a historic building rather than help save it? In what context may archaeologists wisely forsake "ethical" ideals? 

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